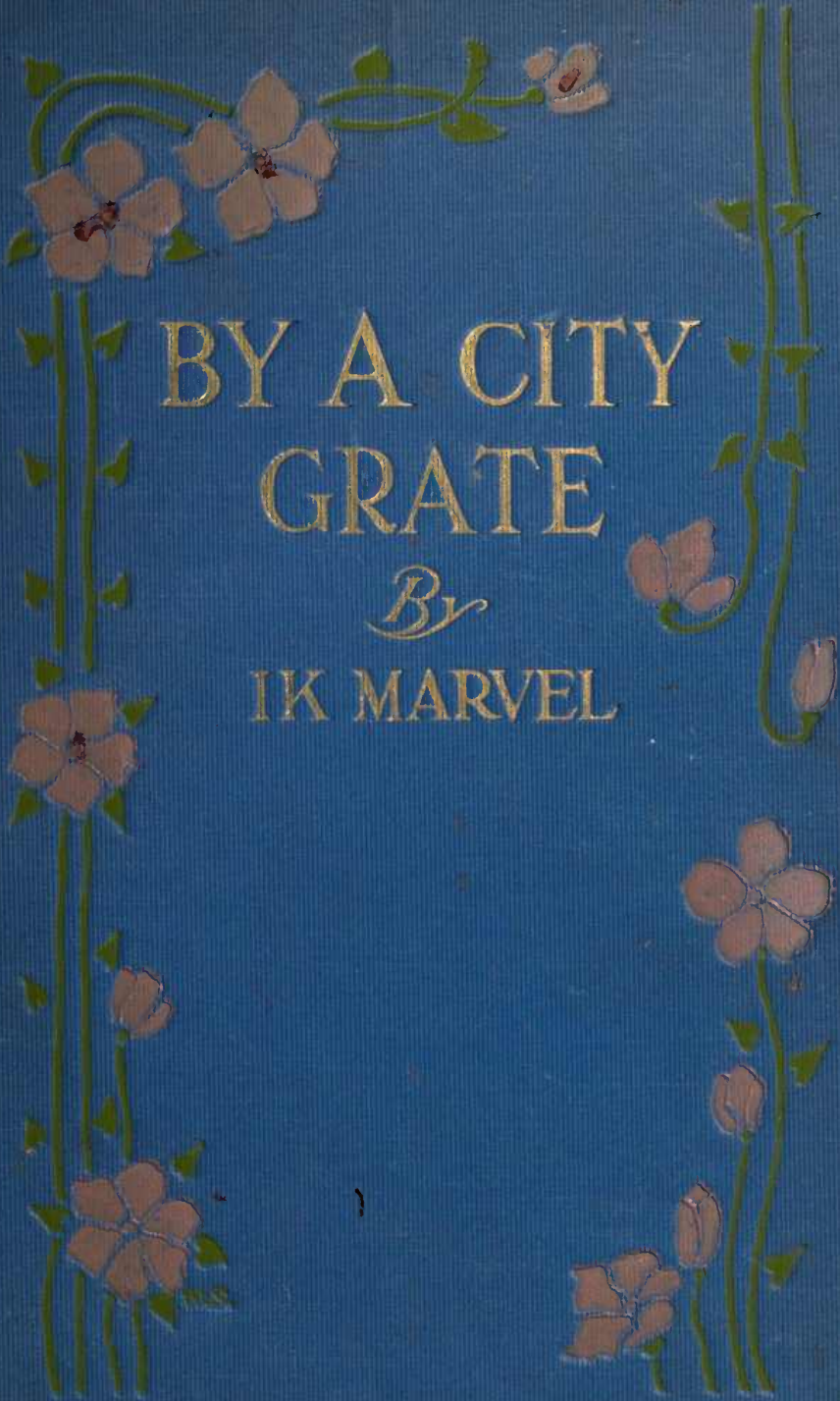


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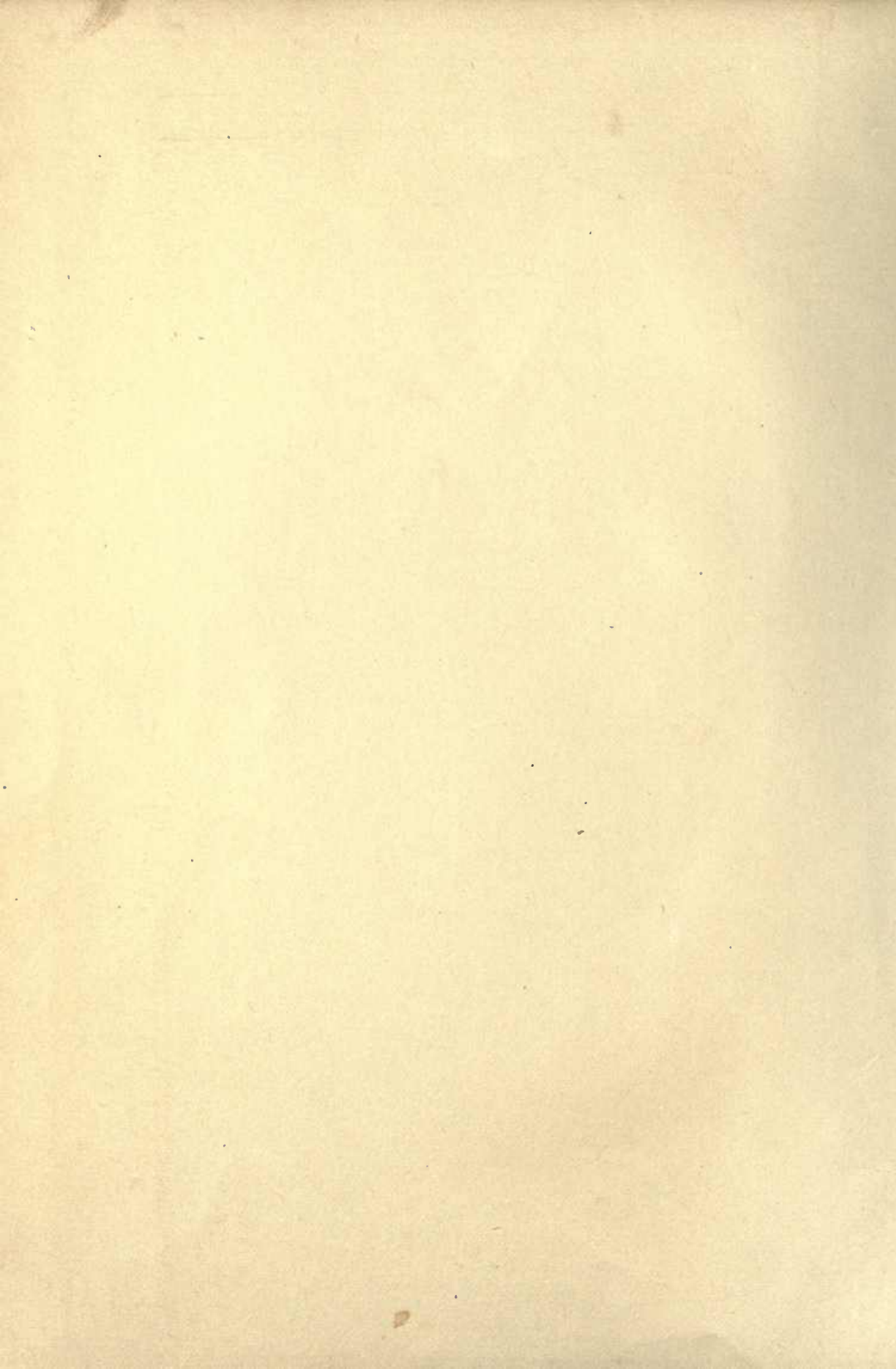
BY A CITY
GRATE
By
IK MARVEL



30
Leigh O'Brien.

The heights of great men
reached and kept,
Were not attained by sudden
flight;
But they, while their companions
slept,
Were toiling upward in the
night.

Mr. + Mrs. Kidhold



BY A CITY GRATE

SECOND REVERIE

SEA-COAL
ANTHRACITE





“She was proud of the attentions of a man who carried
a mind in his brain.”

By A City Grate

—Page 28

By a City Grate

FROM

REVERIES OF A BACHELOR

BY

IK. MARVEL

(DONALD G. MITCHELL)



R. F. FENNO & COMPANY

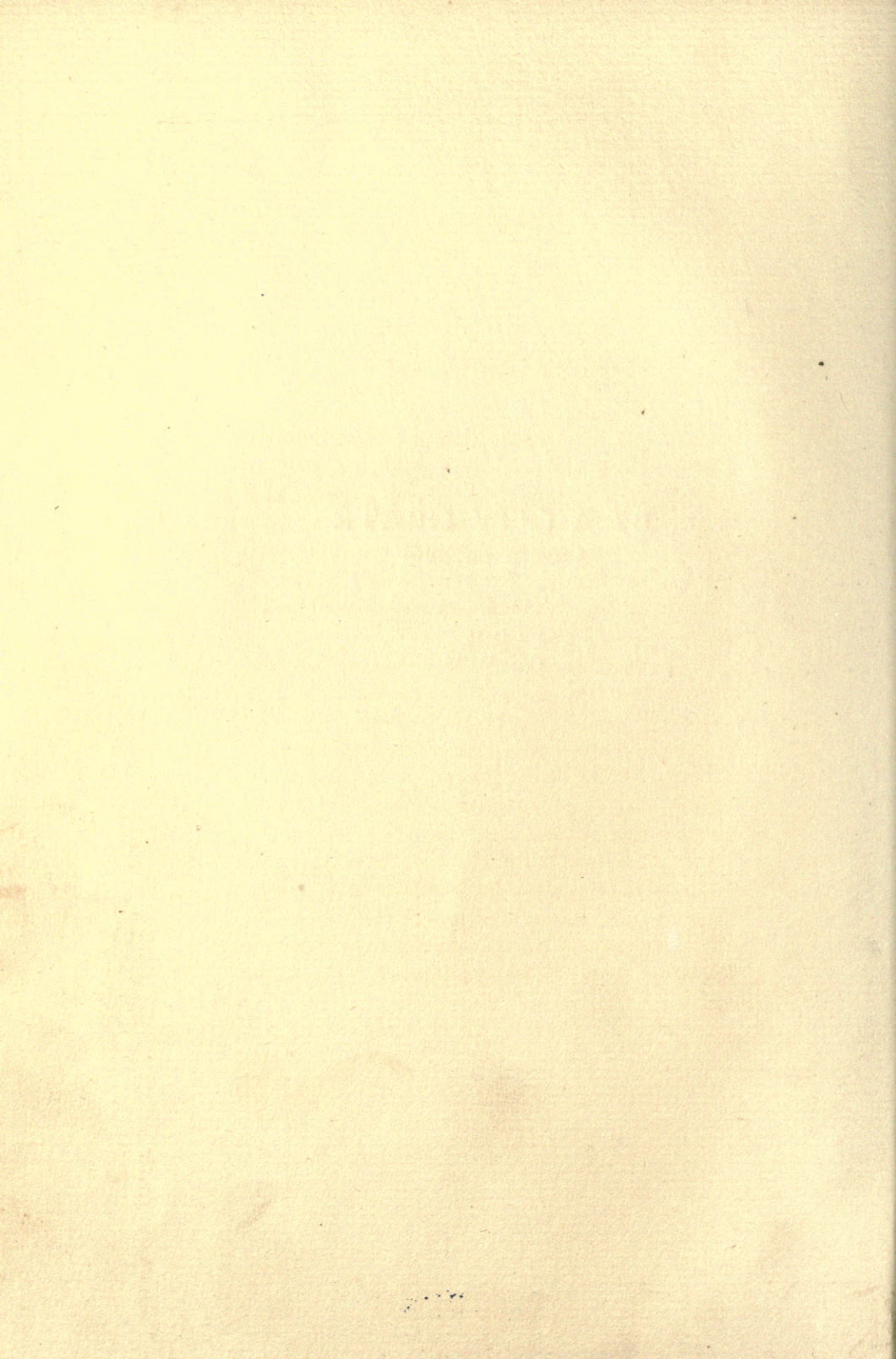
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BY A CITY GRATE

SECOND REVERIE

SEA-COAL
ANTHRACITE

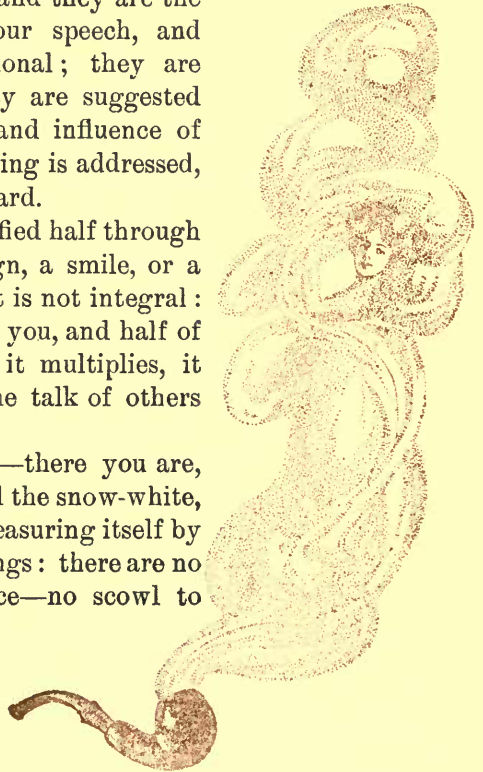


By a City Grate

BLESSED be letters—they are the monitors, they are also the comforters, and they are the only true heart-talkers! Your speech, and their speeches, are conventional; they are molded by circumstance; they are suggested by the observation, remark, and influence of the parties to whom the speaking is addressed, or by whom it may be overheard.

Your truest thought is modified half through its utterance by a look, a sign, a smile, or a sneer. It is not individual; it is not integral: it is social and mixed—half of you, and half of others. It bends, it sways, it multiplies, it retires, and it advances, as the talk of others presses, relaxes, or quickens.

But it is not so of letters—there you are, with only the soulless pen, and the snow-white, virgin paper. Your soul is measuring itself by itself, and saying its own sayings: there are no sneers to modify its utterance—no scowl to



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scare—nothing is present but you, and your thought.

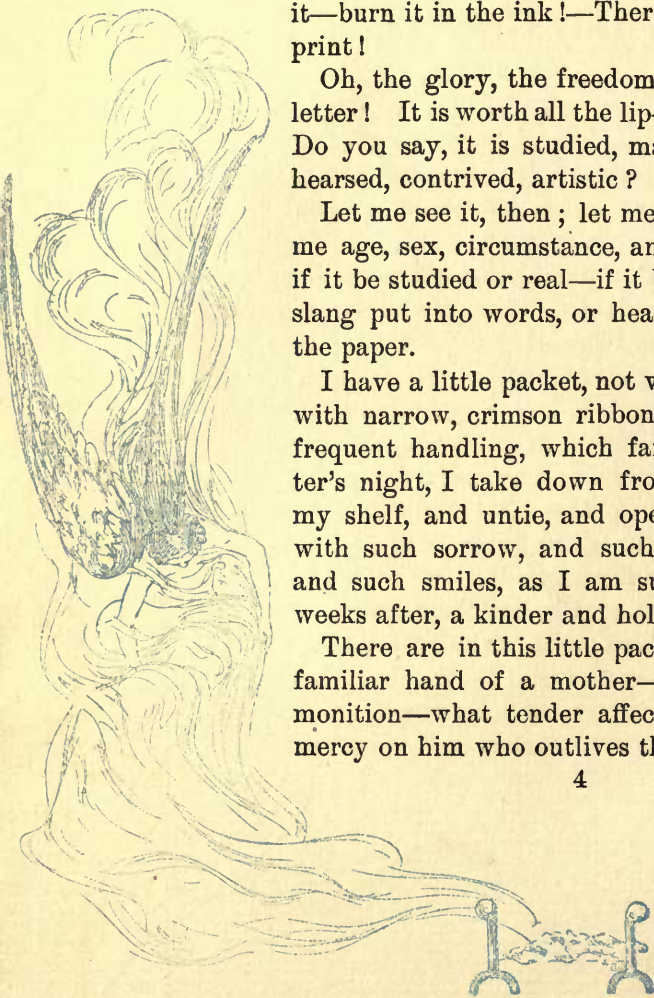
Utter it then freely—write it down—stamp it—burn it in the ink!—There it is, a true soul-print!

Oh, the glory, the freedom, the passion of a letter! It is worth all the lip-talk in the world. Do you say, it is studied, made up, acted, rehearsed, contrived, artistic?

Let me see it, then; let me run it over; tell me age, sex, circumstance, and I will tell you if it be studied or real—if it be the merest lip-slang put into words, or heart-talk blazing on the paper.

I have a little packet, not very large, tied up with narrow, crimson ribbon, now soiled with frequent handling, which far into some winter's night, I take down from its nook upon my shelf, and untie, and open, and run over, with such sorrow, and such joy—such tears and such smiles, as I am sure make me for weeks after, a kinder and holier man.

There are in this little packet, letters in the familiar hand of a mother—what gentle admonition—what tender affection!—God have mercy on him who outlives the tears that such



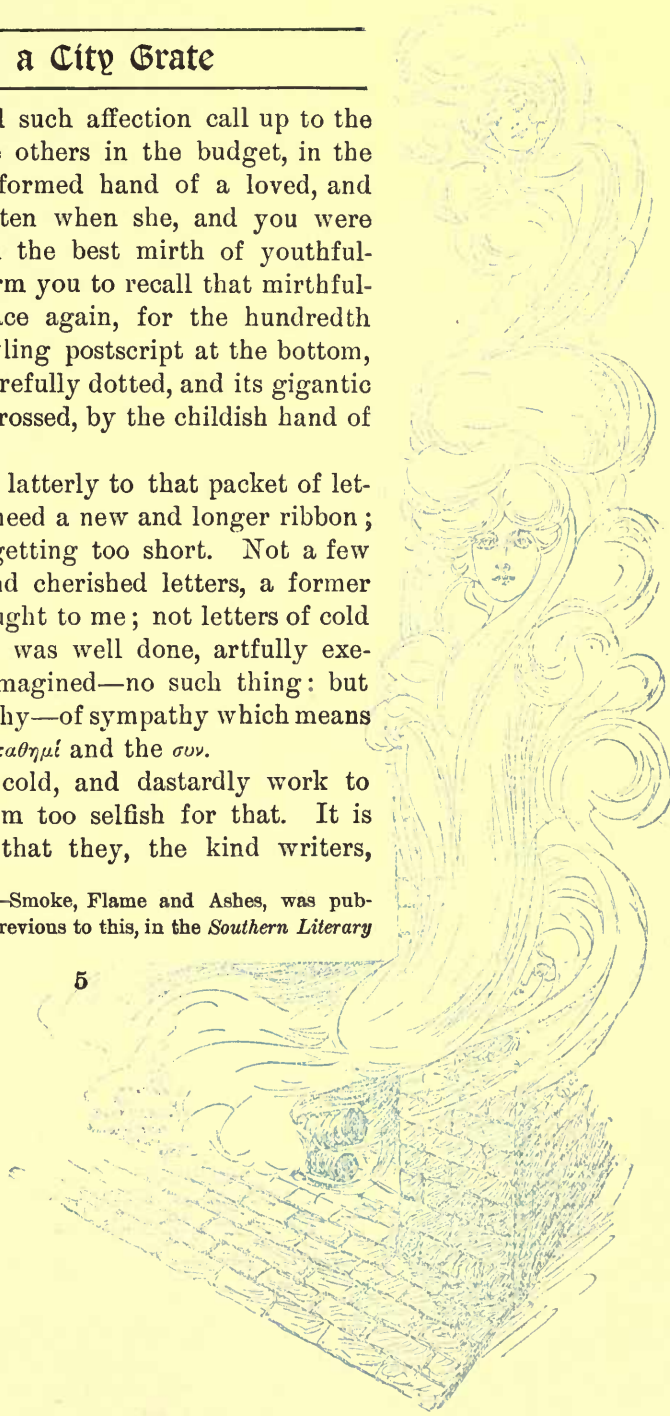
By a City Grate

admonitions, and such affection call up to the eye! There are others in the budget, in the delicate, and unformed hand of a loved, and lost sister—written when she, and you were full of glee, and the best mirth of youthfulness; does it harm you to recall that mirthfulness? or to trace again, for the hundredth time, that scrawling postscript at the bottom, with its *v*'s so carefully dotted, and its gigantic *t*'s so carefully crossed, by the childish hand of a little brother?

I have added latterly to that packet of letters; I almost need a new and longer ribbon; the old one is getting too short. Not a few of these new and cherished letters, a former reverie¹ has brought to me; not letters of cold praise, saying it was well done, artfully executed, prettily imagined—no such thing: but letters of sympathy—of sympathy which means sympathy—the *παθημί* and the *συν*.

It would be cold, and dastardly work to copy them; I am too selfish for that. It is enough to say that they, the kind writers,

¹ The first reverie—Smoke, Flame and Ashes, was published some months previous to this, in the *Southern Literary Messenger*.

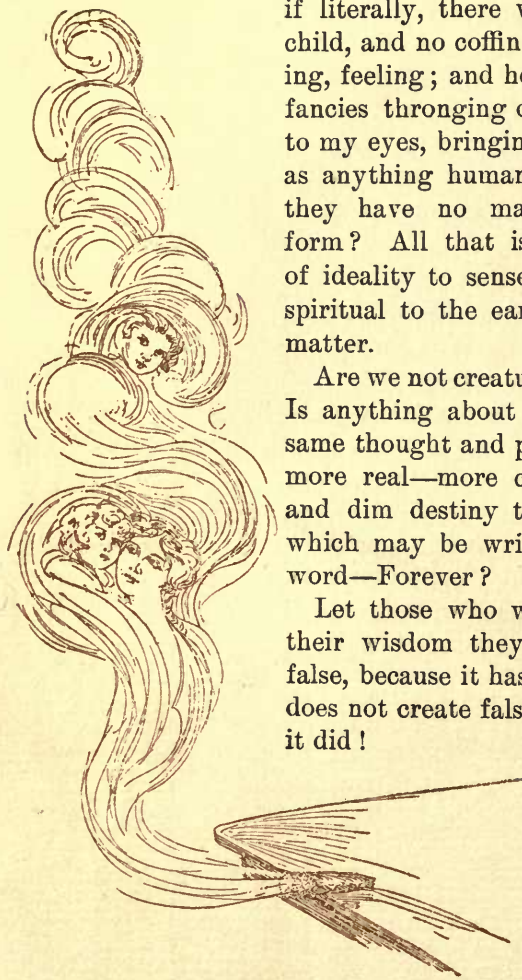


By a City Grate

have seen a heart in the reverie—have felt that it was real, true. They know it; a secret influence has told it. What matters it, pray, if literally, there was no wife, and no dead child, and no coffin in the house? Is not feeling, feeling; and heart, heart! Are not these fancies thronging on my brain, bringing tears to my eyes, bringing joy to my soul, as living, as anything human can be living? What if they have no material type—no objective form? All that is crude—a mere reduction of ideality to sense—a transformation of the spiritual to the earthy—a leveling of soul to matter.

Are we not creatures of thought and passion? Is anything about us more earnest than that same thought and passion? Is there anything more real—more characteristic of that great and dim destiny to which we are born, and which may be written down in that terrible word—Forever?

Let those who will then, sneer at what in their wisdom they call untruth—at what is false, because it has no material presence: this does not create falsity; would to Heaven that it did!



By a City Grate

And yet if there was actual, material truth, superadded to reverie, would such objectors sympathize the more? No! a thousand times, no; the heart that has no sympathy with thoughts and feelings that scorch the soul, is dead also—whatever its mocking tears, and gestures may say—to a coffin or a grave!

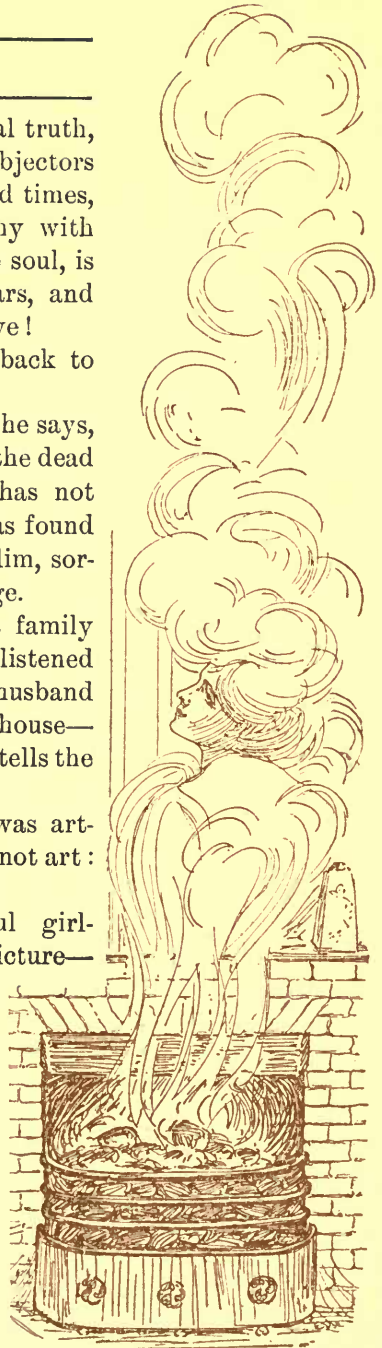
Let them pass, and we will come back to these cherished letters.

A mother, who has lost a child, has, she says, shed a tear—not one, but many—over the dead boy's coldness. And another, who has not lost, but who trembles lest she lose, has found the words failing as she read, and a dim, sorrow-borne mist, spreading over the page.

Another, yet rejoicing in all those family ties, that make life a charm, has listened nervously to careful reading, until the husband is called home, and the coffin is in the house—"Stop!"—she says; and a gush of tears tells the rest.

Yet the cold critic will say—"It was artfully done." A curse on him!—it was not art: it was nature.

Another, a young, fresh, healthful girl-mind, has seen something in the love-picture—



By a City Grate

albeit so weak—of truth; and has kindly believed that it must be earnest. Ay, indeed is it, fair, and generous one—earnest as life and hope! Who, indeed, with a heart at all, that has not yet slipped away irreparably, and forever from the shores of youth—from that fairy-land which young enthusiasm creates, and over which bright dreams hover—but knows it to be real? And so such things will be real, till hopes are dashed, and death is come.

Another, a father, has laid down the book in tears.

—God bless them all! How far better this, than the cold praise of newspaper paragraphs, or the critically contrived approval of colder friends!

Let me gather up these letters, carefully—to be read when the heart is faint, and sick of all that there is unreal, and selfish in the world. Let me tie them together, with a new and longer bit of ribbon—not by a love-knot, that is too hard—but by an easy-slipping knot, that so I may get at them the better. And now, they are all together, a snug packet, and we will label them, not sentimentally (I pity the one who thinks it!), but earnestly, and in

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the best meaning of the term—*SOUVENIRS DU CŒUR*.

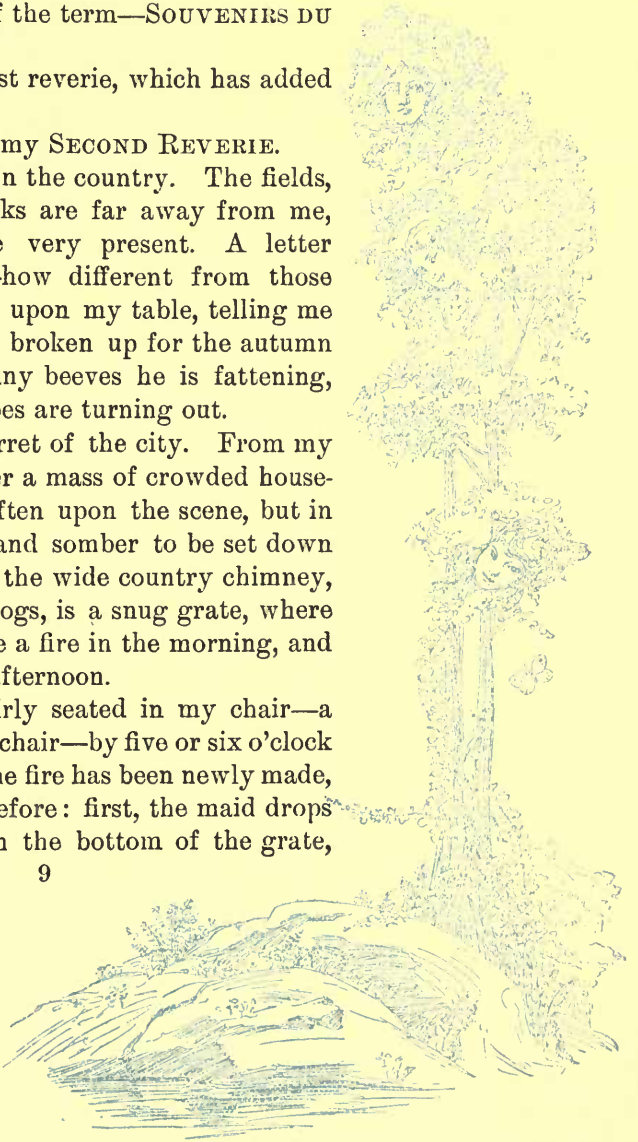
Thanks to my first reverie, which has added to such a treasure!

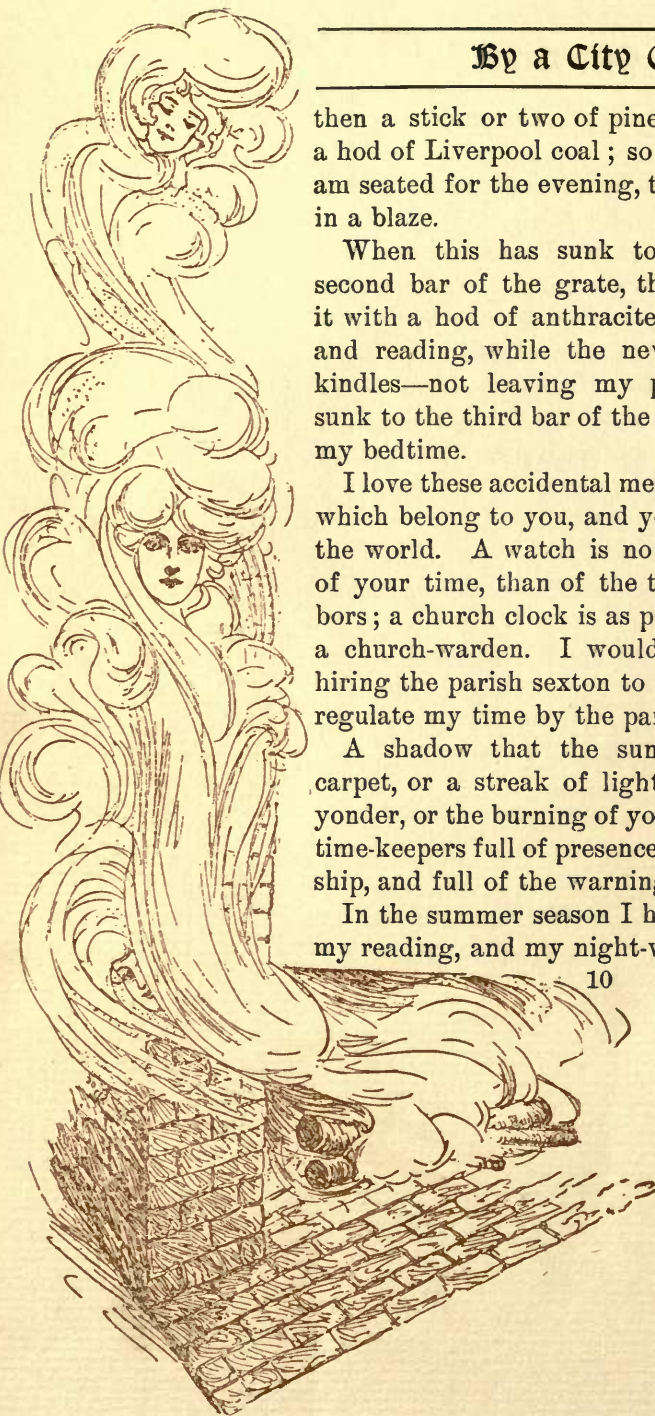
—And now to my *SECOND REVERIE*.

I am no longer in the country. The fields, the trees, the brooks are far away from me, and yet they are very present. A letter from my tenant—how different from those other letters!—lies upon my table, telling me what fields he has broken up for the autumn grain, and how many beeves he is fattening, and how the potatoes are turning out.

But I am in a garret of the city. From my window I look over a mass of crowded house-tops—moralizing often upon the scene, but in a strain too long, and somber to be set down here. In place of the wide country chimney, with its iron fire-dogs, is a snug grate, where the maid makes me a fire in the morning, and rekindles it in the afternoon.

I am usually fairly seated in my chair—a cozily stuffed office chair—by five or six o'clock of the evening. The fire has been newly made, perhaps an hour before: first, the maid drops a withe of paper in the bottom of the grate,





By a City Grate

then a stick or two of pine-wood, and after it a hod of Liverpool coal ; so that by the time I am seated for the evening, the sea-coal is fairly in a blaze.

When this has sunk to a level with the second bar of the grate, the maid replenishes it with a hod of anthracite ; and I sit musing and reading, while the new coal warms and kindles—not leaving my place, until it has sunk to the third bar of the grate, which marks my bedtime.

I love these accidental measures of the hours, which belong to you, and your life, and not to the world. A watch is no more the measure of your time, than of the time of your neighbors ; a church clock is as public, and vulgar as a church-warden. I would as soon think of hiring the parish sexton to make my bed, as to regulate my time by the parish clock.

A shadow that the sun casts upon your carpet, or a streak of light on the slated roof yonder, or the burning of your fire, are pleasant time-keepers full of presence, full of companionship, and full of the warning—time is passing !

In the summer season I have even measured my reading, and my night-watch, by the burn-

By a City Grate

ing of a taper; and I have scratched upon the handle to the little bronze taper-holder, that meaning passage of the New Testament—*Νοξ γὰρ ἐρχεται*—the night cometh!

But I must get upon my reverie: it was a drizzly evening; I had worked hard during the day, and had drawn my boots—thrust my feet into slippers—thrown on a Turkish loose dress, and Greek cap—souvenirs to me of other times, and other places, and sat watching the lively, uncertain yellow play of the bituminous flame.



By a City Grate

SEA-COAL



It is like a flirt—mused I ; lively, uncertain, bright-colored, waving here and there, melting the coal into black shapeless mass, making foul, sooty smoke, and pasty, trashy residuum ! Yet withal—pleasantly sparkling, dancing, prettily waving, and leaping like a roebuck from point to point.

How like a flirt ! And yet is not this tossing caprice of girlhood, to which I liken my sea-coal flame, a native play of life, and belonging by nature to the play-time of life ? Is it not a sort of essential fire-kindling to the weightier and truer passions—even as Jenny puts the soft coal first, the better to kindle the anthracite ? Is it not a sort of necessary consumption of young vapors, which float in the soul, and which is left thereafter the purer ? Is there not a stage somewhere in every man's youth, for just such waving, idle, heart-blaze,

By a City Grate

which means nothing, yet which must be got over?

Lamartine says, somewhere, very prettily, that there is more of quick running sap, and floating shade in a young tree; but more of fire in the heart of a sturdy oak—*Il y a plus de sève folle et d'ombre flottante dans les jeunes plants de la forêt; il y a plus de feu dans le vieux cœur du chêne.*

Is Lamartine playing off his prettiness of expression, dressing up with his poetry—making a good conscience against the ghost of some accusing Graziella, or is there truth in the matter?

A man who has seen sixty years, whether widower or bachelor, may well put such sentiment into words: it feeds his wasted heart with hope; it renews the exultation of youth by the pleasantest of equivocation, and the most charming of self-confidence. But after all, is it not true? Is not the heart like new blossoming field-plants, whose first flowers are half-formed, one-sided perhaps, but by and by, in maturity of season, putting out wholesome, well-formed blossoms that will hold their leaves long and bravely?



By a City Grate

Bulwer in his story of the Caxtons, has counted first heart-flights mere fancy-passages—a dalliance with the breezes of love, which pass, and leave healthful heart appetite. Half the reading world has read the story of Trevanion and Pisistratus. But Bulwer is—past; his heart-life is used up—*épuisé*. Such a man can very safely rant about the cool judgment of after years.

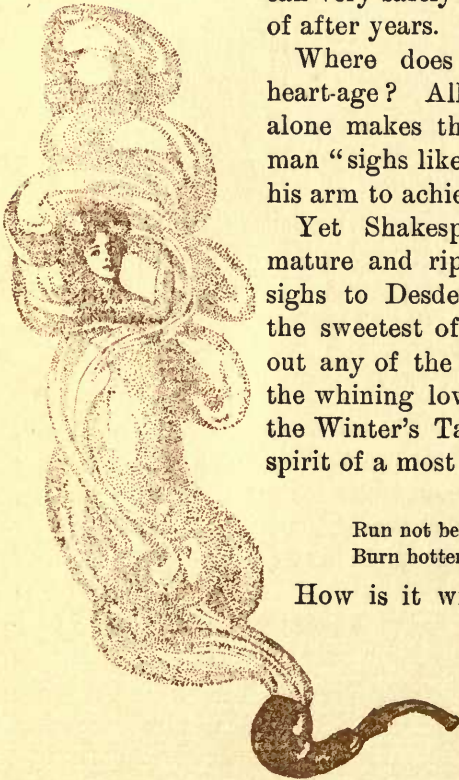
Where does Shakespeare put the unripe heart-age? All of it before the ambition, that alone makes the hero-soul. The Shakespeare man “sighs like a furnace,” before he stretches his arm to achieve the “bauble, reputation.”

Yet Shakespeare has meted a soul-love, mature and ripe, without any young furnace sighs to Desdemona and Othello. Cordelia, the sweetest of his play creations, loves without any of the mawkish matter, which makes the whining love of a Juliet. And Florizel in the Winter's Tale, says to Perdita in the true spirit of a most sound heart:

My desires

Run not before mine honor, nor my wishes
Burn hotter than my faith.

How is it with Hector and Andromache?



By a City Grate

no sea-coal blaze, but one that is constant, enduring, pervading: a pair of hearts full of esteem, and best love—good, honest, and sound.

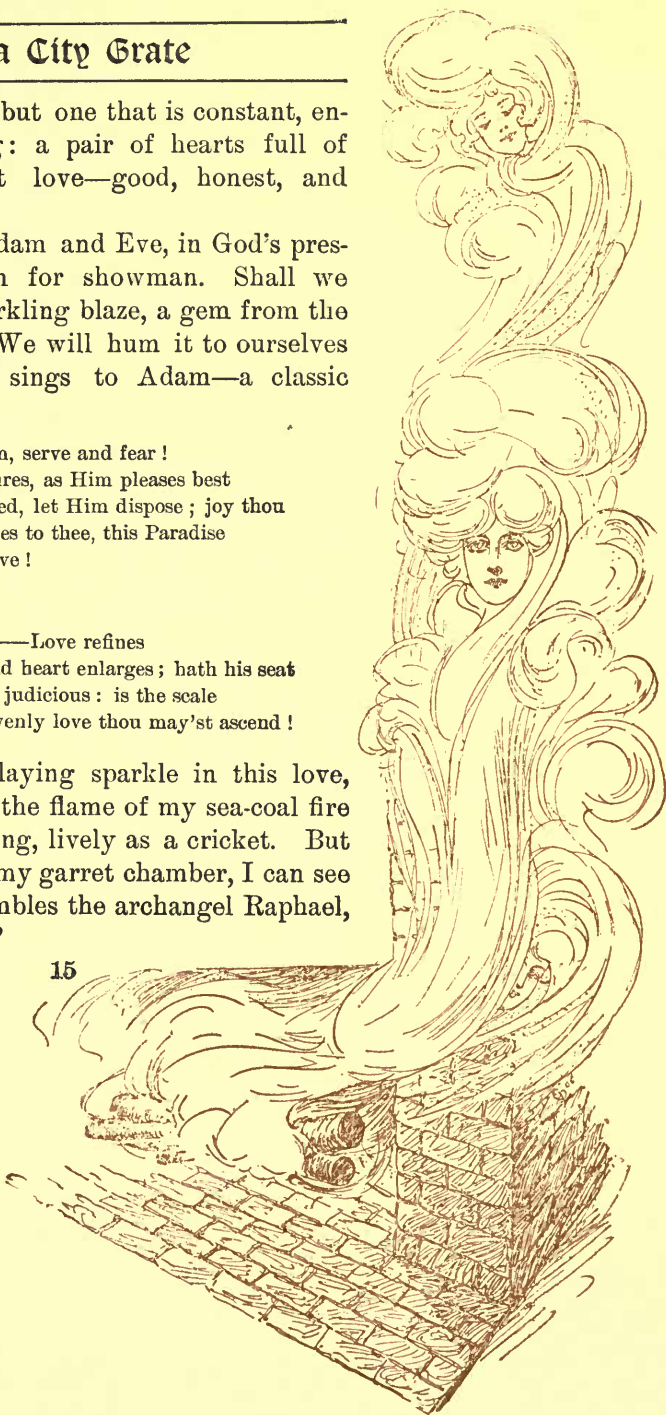
Look now at Adam and Eve, in God's presence, with Milton for showman. Shall we quote by this sparkling blaze, a gem from the *Paradise Lost*? We will hum it to ourselves—what Raphael sings to Adam—a classic song.

—Him, serve and fear!
Of other creatures, as Him pleases best
Wherever placed, let Him dispose; joy thou
In what he gives to thee, this Paradise
And thy fair eve!

And again:

—Love refines
The thoughts, and heart enlarges; hath his seat
In reason, and is judicious: is the scale
By which to heavenly love thou may'st ascend!

None of the playing sparkle in this love, which belongs to the flame of my sea-coal fire that is now dancing, lively as a cricket. But on looking about my garret chamber, I can see nothing that resembles the archangel Raphael, or "thy fair Eve."



By a City Grate

There is a degree of moisture about the sea-coal flame, which with the most earnest of my musing, I find it impossible to attach to that idea of a waving sparkling heart which my fire suggests. A damp heart must be a foul thing to be sure. But whoever heard of one?

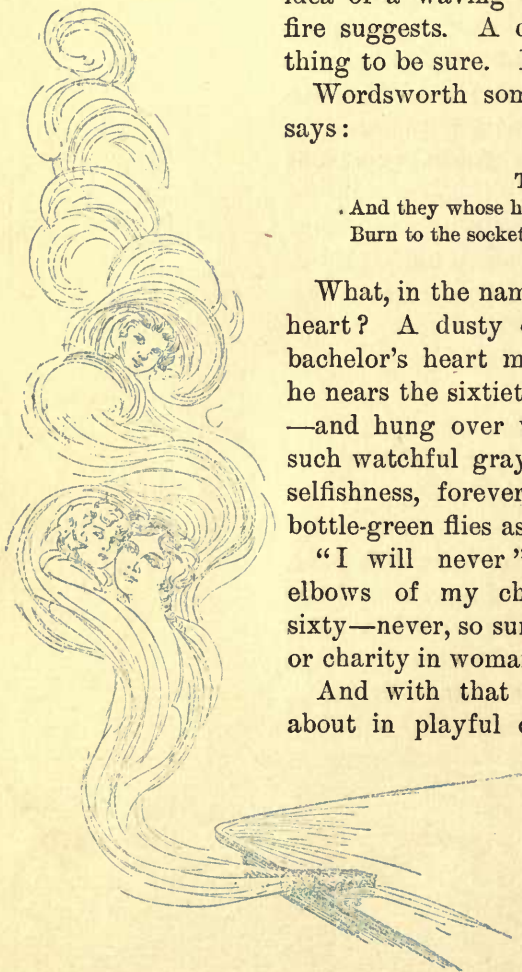
Wordsworth somewhere in the *Excursion* says:

The good die first,
And they whose hearts are *dry* as summer dust
Burn to the socket!

What, in the name of Rydal Mount, is a dry heart? A dusty one, I can conceive of: a bachelor's heart must be somewhat dusty, as he nears the sixtieth summer of his pilgrimage—and hung over with cobwebs, in which sit such watchful gray old spiders as avarice, and selfishness, forever on the lookout for such bottle-green flies as lust.

"I will never"—said I—gripping at the elbows of my chair—"live a bachelor till sixty—never, so surely as there is hope in man, or charity in woman, or faith in both!"

And with that thought, my heart leaped about in playful coruscations, even like the



By a City Grate

flame of the sea-coal—rising, and wrapping round old and tender memories, and images that were present to me—trying to cling, and yet no sooner fastened, than off—dancing again, riotous in its exultation—a succession of heart-sparkles, blazing, and going out!

—And is there not—mused I—a portion of this world, forever blazing in just such lively sparkles, waving here and there as the air-currents fan them?

Take for instance, your heart of sentiment, and quick sensibility, a weak, warm-working heart, flying off in tangents of unhappy influence, unguided by prudence, and perhaps virtue. There is a paper by Mackenzie, in the *Mirror* for April, 1780, which sets this untoward sensibility in a strong light.

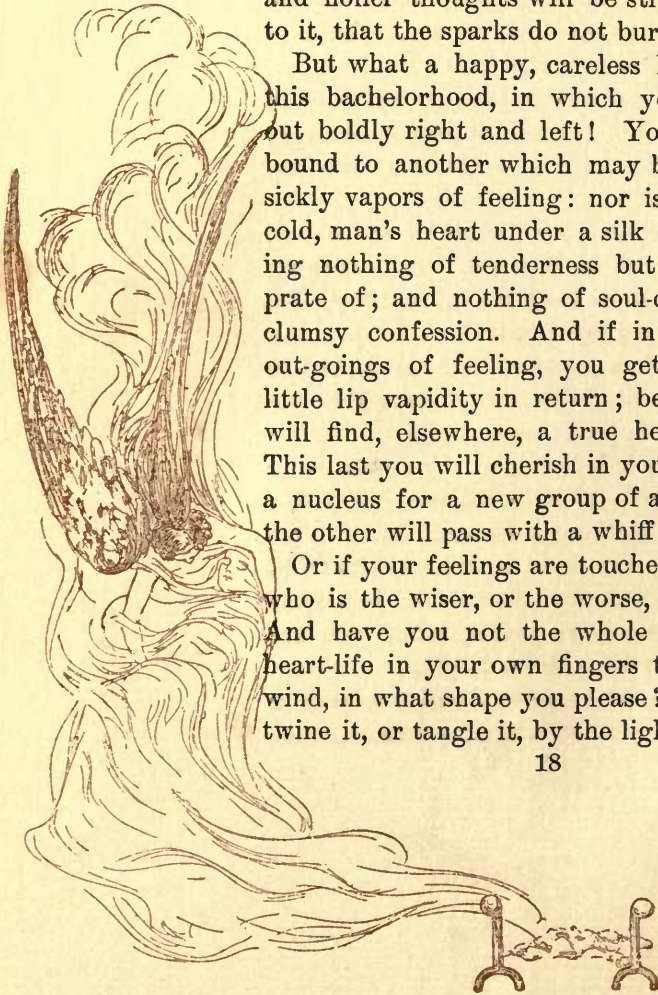
And the more it is indulged, the more strong and binding such a habit of sensibility becomes. Poor Mackenzie himself must have suffered thus; you cannot read his books without feeling it; your eye, in spite of you, runs over with his sensitive griefs, while you are half ashamed of his success at picture-making. It is a terrible inheritance; and one that a strong man or woman will study to subdue:

By a City Grate

it is a vain sea-coal sparkling, which will count no good. The world is made of much hard, flinty substance, against which your better, and holier thoughts will be striking fire—see to it, that the sparks do not burn you!

But what a happy, careless life belongs to this bachelorhood, in which you may strike out boldly right and left! Your heart is not bound to another which may be full of only sickly vapors of feeling: nor is it frozen to a cold, man's heart under a silk bodice—knowing nothing of tenderness but the name, to prate of; and nothing of soul-confidence, but clumsy confession. And if in your careless out-goings of feeling, you get here, only a little lip vapidly in return; be sure that you will find, elsewhere, a true heart utterance. This last you will cherish in your inner soul—a nucleus for a new group of affections; and the other will pass with a whiff of your cigar.

Or if your feelings are touched, struck, hurt, who is the wiser, or the worse, but you only? And have you not the whole skein of your heart-life in your own fingers to wind, or unwind, in what shape you please? Shake it, or twine it, or tangle it, by the light of your fire,

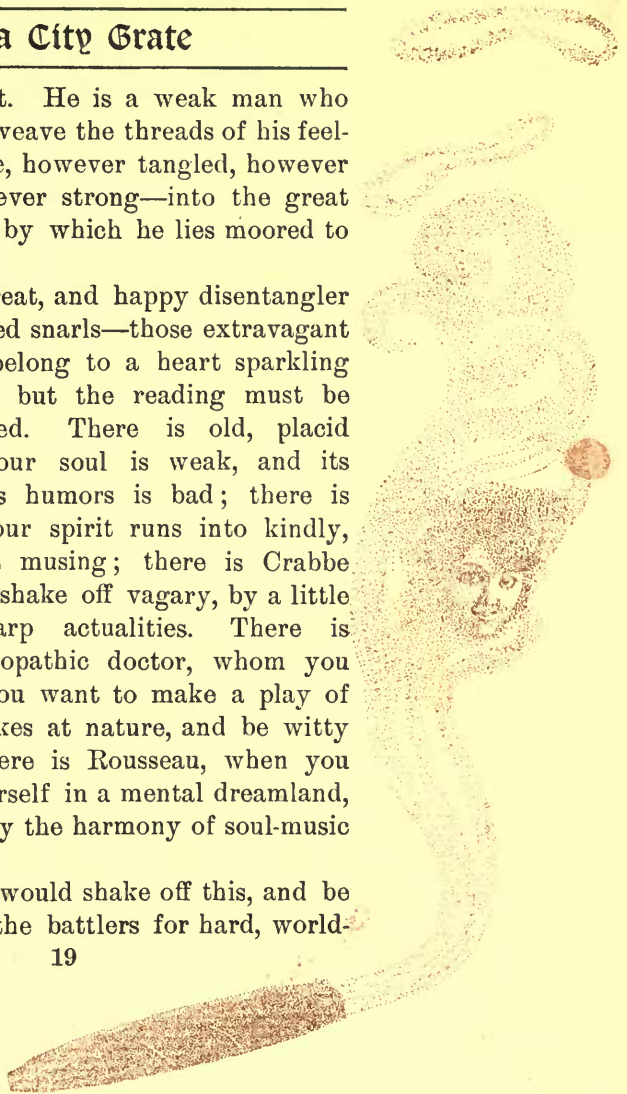


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as you fancy best. He is a weak man who cannot twist and weave the threads of his feeling—however fine, however tangled, however strained, or however strong—into the great cable of purpose, by which he lies moored to his life of action.

Reading is a great, and happy disentangler of all those knotted snarls—those extravagant vagaries, which belong to a heart sparkling with sensibility; but the reading must be cautiously directed. There is old, placid Burton, when your soul is weak, and its digestion of life's humors is bad; there is Cowper when your spirit runs into kindly, half-sad, religious musing; there is Crabbe when you would shake off vagary, by a little handling of sharp actualities. There is Voltaire, a homeopathic doctor, whom you can read when you want to make a play of life, and crack jokes at nature, and be witty with destiny; there is Rousseau, when you want to lose yourself in a mental dreamland, and be beguiled by the harmony of soul-music and soul-culture.

And when you would shake off this, and be sturdiest among the battlers for hard, world-



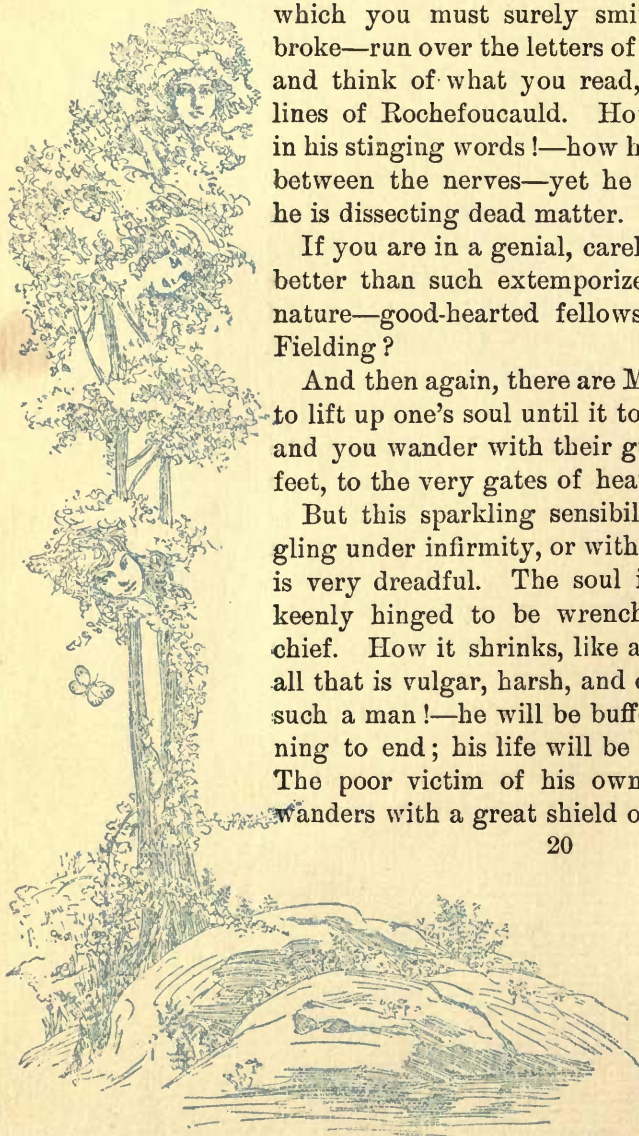
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success, and be forewarned of rocks against which you must surely smite—read Bolingbroke—run over the letters of Lyttleton; read, and think of what you read, in the cracking lines of Rochefoucauld. How he sums us up in his stinging words!—how he puts the scalpel between the nerves—yet he never hurts; for he is dissecting dead matter.

If you are in a genial, careless mood, who is better than such extemporizers of feeling and nature—good-hearted fellows—as Sterne and Fielding?

And then again, there are Milton and Isaiah, to lift up one's soul until it touches cloud-land, and you wander with their guidance, on swift feet, to the very gates of heaven.

But this sparkling sensibility to one struggling under infirmity, or with grief or poverty, is very dreadful. The soul is too nicely and keenly hinged to be wrenched without mischief. How it shrinks, like a hurt child, from all that is vulgar, harsh, and crude! Alas, for such a man!—he will be buffeted, from beginning to end; his life will be a sea of troubles. The poor victim of his own quick spirit he wanders with a great shield of doubt hung be-



By a City Grate

fore him, so that none, not even friends, can see the goodness of such kindly qualities as belong to him. Poverty, if it comes upon him, he wrestles with in secret, with strong, frenzied struggles. He wraps his scant clothes about him to keep him from the cold ; and eyes the world, as if every creature in it was breathing chill blasts at him, from every opened mouth. He threads the crowded ways of the city, proud in his griefs, vain in his weakness, not stopping to do good. Bulwer, in the New Timon, has painted in a pair of stinging Pope-like lines, this feeling in a woman :

Her vengeful pride, a kind of madness grown,
She hugged her wrongs, her sorrow was her throne !

Cold picture ! yet the heart was sparkling under it, like my sea-coal fire ; lifting and blazing, and lighting and falling—but with no object ; and only such little heat as begins and ends within.

Those fine sensibilities, ever active, are chasing and observing all ; they catch a hue from what the dull and callous pass by unnoticed—because unknown. They blunder at the great variety of the world's opinions ; they see tokens

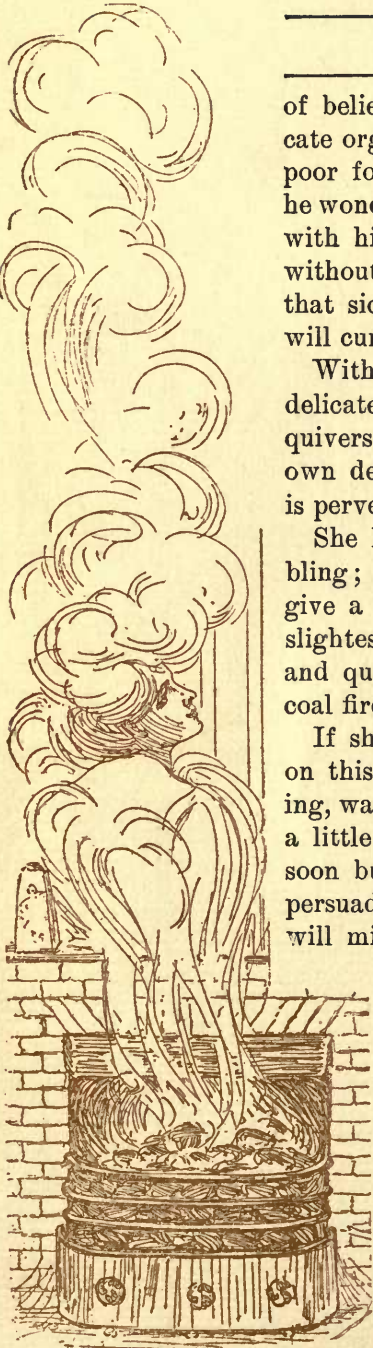
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of belief, where others see none. That delicate organization is a curse to a man : and yet, poor fool, he does not see where his cure lies ; he wonders at his griefs, and has never reckoned with himself their source. He studies others, without studying himself. He eats the leaves that sicken, and never plucks up the root that will cure.

With a woman it is worse ; with her, this delicate susceptibility is like a frail flower, that quivers at every rough blast of heaven ; her own delicacy wounds her ; her highest charm is perverted to a curse.

She listens with fear ; she reads with trembling ; she looks with dread. Her sympathies give a tone, like the harp of Æolus, to the slightest breath. Her sensibility lights up, and quivers and falls, like the flame of a sea-coal fire.

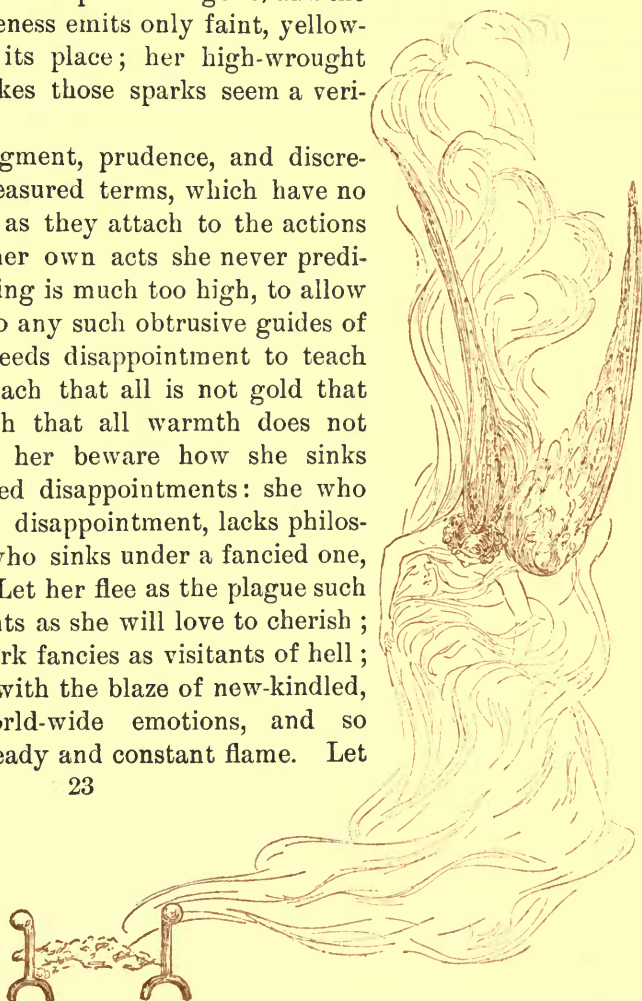
If she loves (and may not a bachelor reason on this daintiest of topics), her love is a gushing, wavy flame, lit up with hope, that has only a little kindling matter to light it ; and this soon burns out. Yet intense sensibility will persuade her that the flame still scorches. She will mistake the annoyance of affection unre-



By a City Grate

quited for the sting of a passion, that she fancies still burns. She does not look deep enough to see that the passion is gone, and the shocked sensitiveness emits only faint, yellowish sparkles in its place; her high-wrought organization makes those sparks seem a veritable flame.

With her, judgment, prudence, and discretion are cold measured terms, which have no meaning, except as they attach to the actions of others. Of her own acts she never predicates them; feeling is much too high, to allow her to submit to any such obtrusive guides of conduct. She needs disappointment to teach her truth; to teach that all is not gold that glitters—to teach that all warmth does not blaze. But let her beware how she sinks under any fancied disappointments: she who sinks under real disappointment, lacks philosophy; but she who sinks under a fancied one, lacks purpose. Let her flee as the plague such brooding thoughts as she will love to cherish; let her spurn dark fancies as visitants of hell; let the soul rise with the blaze of new-kindled, active and world-wide emotions, and so brighten into steady and constant flame. Let



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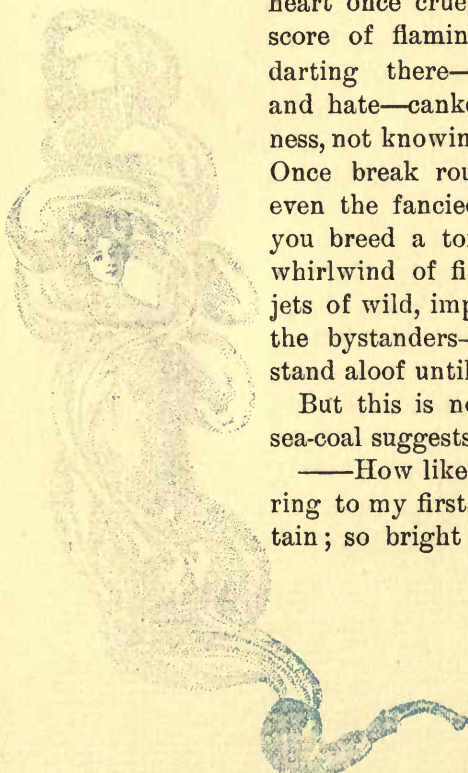
her abjure such poets as Cowper, or Byron, or even Wordsworth; and if she must poetize, let her lay her mind to such manly verse as Pope's, or to such sound and ringing organry as Comus.

My fire was getting dull, and I thrust in the poker: it started up on the instant into a hundred little angry tongues of flame.

—Just so—thought I—the over-sensitive heart once cruelly disturbed, will fling out a score of flaming passions, darting here and darting there—half-smoke, half-flame—love and hate—canker and joy—wild in its madness, not knowing whither its sparks are flying. Once break roughly upon the affections, or even the fancied affections of such a soul, and you breed a tornado of maddened action—a whirlwind of fire that hisses, and sends out jets of wild, impulsive combustion, that make the bystanders—even those most friendly—stand aloof until the storm is past.

But this is not all the dashing flame of my sea-coal suggests.

—How like a flirt! mused I again, recurring to my first thought—so lively, yet uncertain; so bright yet so flickering! Your true



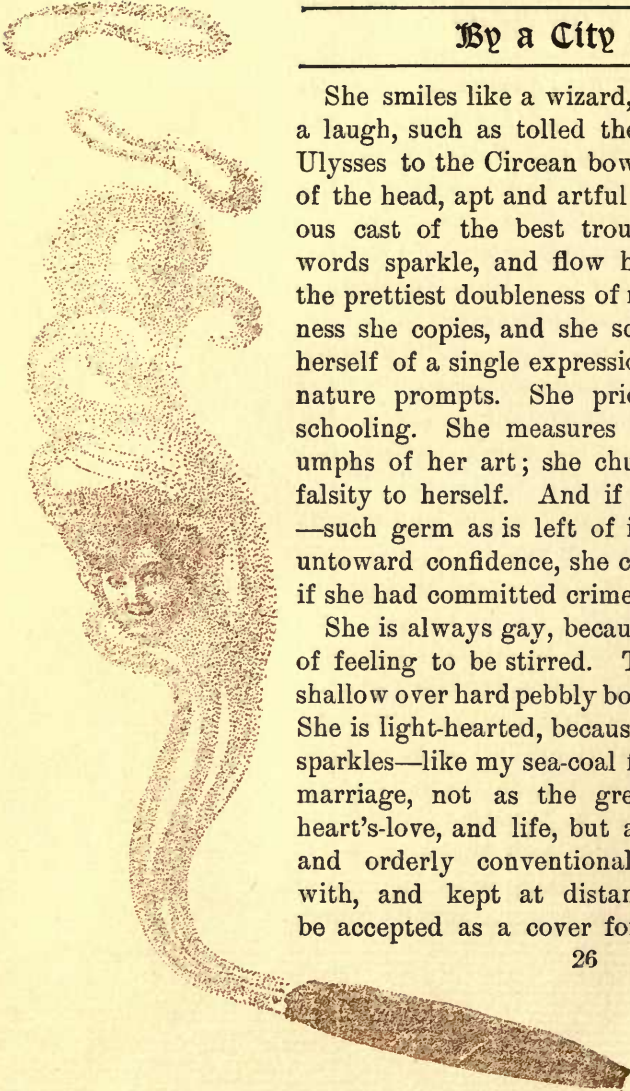
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flirt plays with sparkles; her heart, much as there is of it, spends itself in sparkles; she measures it to sparkle, and habit grows into nature, so that anon, it can only sparkle. How carefully she cramps it, if the flames show too great a heat; how dexterously she flings its blaze here and there; how coyly she subdues it; how winningly she lights it!

All this is the entire reverse of the unpremeditated dartings of the soul at which I have been looking; sensibility scorns heart-curbings, and heart-teachings; sensibility inquires not—how much! but only—where?

Your true flirt has a coarse-grained soul; well modulated and well tutored, but there is no fineness in it. All its native fineness is made coarse, by coarse efforts of the will. True feeling is a rustic vulgarity, the flirt does not tolerate; she counts its healthiest and most honest manifestation, all sentiment. Yet she will play you off a pretty string of sentiment, which she has gathered from the poets; she adjusts it prettily as a Gobelin weaver adjusts the colors in his *tapis*. She shades it off delightfully; there are no bold contrasts, but a most artistic mellow of *nuances*.





By a City Grate

She smiles like a wizard, and jingles it with a laugh, such as tolled the poor home-bound Ulysses to the Circean bower. She has a cast of the head, apt and artful as the most dexterous cast of the best trout-killing rod. Her words sparkle, and flow hurriedly, and with the prettiest doubleness of meaning. Naturalness she copies, and she scorns. She accuses herself of a single expression or regard, which nature prompts. She prides herself on her schooling. She measures her wit by the triumphs of her art; she chuckles over her own falsity to herself. And if by chance her soul—such germ as is left of it—betrays her into untoward confidence, she condemns herself, as if she had committed crime.

She is always gay, because she has no depth of feeling to be stirred. The brook that runs shallow over hard pebbly bottom always rustles. She is light-hearted, because her heart floats in sparkles—like my sea-coal fire. She counts on marriage, not as the great absorbent of a heart's-love, and life, but as a happy, feasible, and orderly conventionality, to be played with, and kept at distance, and finally to be accepted as a cover for the faint and taw-

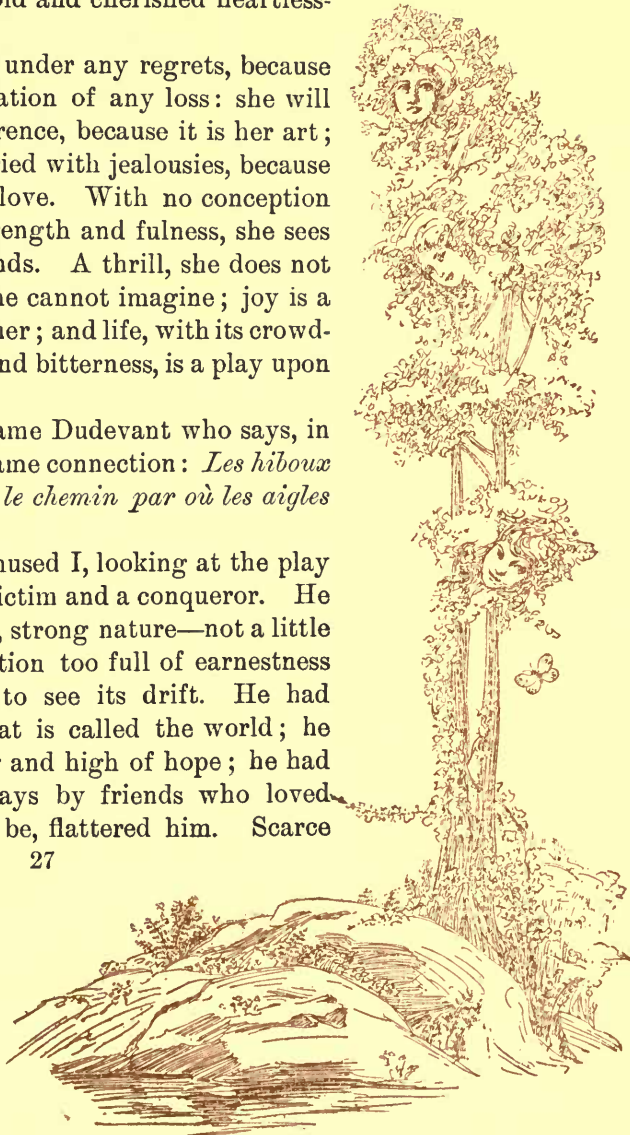
By a City Grate

dry sparkles of an old and cherished heartlessness.

She will not pine under any regrets, because she has no appreciation of any loss: she will not chafe at indifference, because it is her art; she will not be worried with jealousies, because she is ignorant of love. With no conception of the soul in its strength and fulness, she sees no lack of its demands. A thrill, she does not know; a passion, she cannot imagine; joy is a name; grief is another; and life, with its crowding scenes of love, and bitterness, is a play upon the stage.

I think it is Madame Dudevant who says, in something like the same connection: *Les hiboux ne connaissent pas le chemin par où les aigles vont au soleil.*

—Poor Ned! mused I, looking at the play of the fire—was a victim and a conqueror. He was a man of a full, strong nature—not a little impulsive—with action too full of earnestness for most of men to see its drift. He had known little of what is called the world; he was fresh in feeling and high of hope; he had been encircled always by friends who loved him, and who, may be, flattered him. Scarce





By a City Grate

had he entered upon the tangled life of the city, before he met with a sparkling face and an airy step, that stirred something in poor Ned, that he had never felt before. With him, to feel was to act. He was not one to be despised ; for notwithstanding he wore a country air, and the awkwardness of a man who has yet the *bienséance* of social life before him, he had the soul, the courage, and the talent of a strong man. Little gifted in the knowledge of face-play, he easily mistook those coy manœuvres of a sparkling heart, for something kindred to his own true emotions.

She was proud of the attentions of a man who carried a mind in his brain ; and flattered poor Ned almost into servility. Ned had no friends to counsel him ; or if he had them, his impulses would have blinded him. Never was dodger more artful at the Olympic Games than the Peggy of Ned's heart-affection. He was charmed, beguiled, entranced.

When Ned spoke of love, she staved it off with the prettiest of sly looks that only bewildered him the more. A charming creature to be sure ; coy as a dove !

So he went on, poor fool, until one day—he

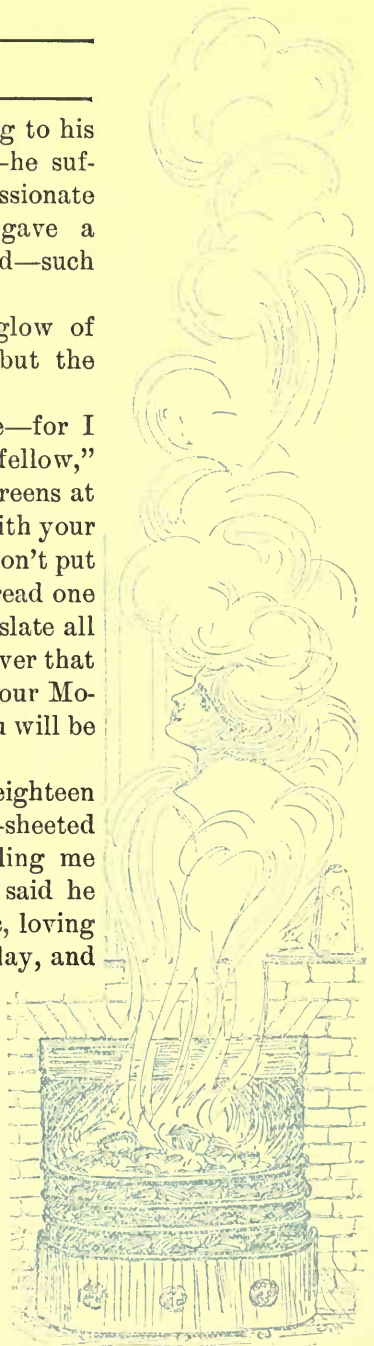
By a City Grate

told me of it with the blood mounting to his temples, and his eye shooting flame—he suffered his feelings to run out in passionate avowal—entreaty—everything. She gave a pleasant, noisy laugh, and manifested—such pretty surprise!

He was looking for the intense glow of passion; and lo, there was nothing but the shifting sparkle of a sea-coal flame.

I wrote him a letter of condolence—for I was his senior by a year; “My dear fellow,” said I, “diet yourself; you can find greens at the up-town market; eat a little fish with your dinner; abstain from heating drinks: don’t put too much butter to your cauliflower; read one of Jeremy Taylor’s sermons, and translate all the quotations at sight; run carefully over that exquisite picture of Geo. Dandin in your *Molière*, and my word for it, in a week you will be sound man.”

He was too angry to reply; but eighteen months thereafter I got a thick, three-sheeted letter, with a dove upon the seal, telling me that he was as happy as a king: he said he had married a good-hearted, domestic, loving wife, who was as lovely as a June day, and



By a City Grate

that their baby, not three months old, was as bright as a spot of June day sunshine on the grass.

—What a tender, delicate, loving wife—mused I—such flashing, flaming flirt must in the end make; the prostitute of fashion; the bauble of fifty hearts idle as hers; the shifting make-piece of a stage scene; the actress, now in peasant, and now in princely petticoats! How it would cheer an honest soul to call her—his! What a culmination of his heart-life: what a rich dream-land to be realized!

—Bah! and I thrust the poker into the clotted mass of fading coal—just such, and so worthless is the used heart of a city flirt; just so the incessant sparkle of her life, and frittering passions, fuses all that is sound and combustible, into black, soothy, shapeless residuum.

When I marry a flirt, I will buy second-hand clothes of the Jews.

—Still—mused I—as the flame danced again—there is a distinction between coquetry and flirtation.

A coquette sparkles, but it is more the sparkle of a harmless and pretty vanity, than of calculation. It is the play of humors in the

By a City Grate

blood, and not the play of purpose at the heart. It will flicker around a true soul like the blaze around an *omelette au rhum*, leaving the kernel sounder and warmer.

Coquetry, with all its pranks and teasings, makes the spice to your dinner—the mulled wine to your supper. It will drive you to desperation, only to bring you back hotter to the fray. Who would boast a victory that cost no strategy, and no careful disposition of the forces? Who would bulletin such success as my Uncle Toby's, in the back garden, with only the Corporal Trim for assailant? But let a man be very sure that the city is worth the siege!

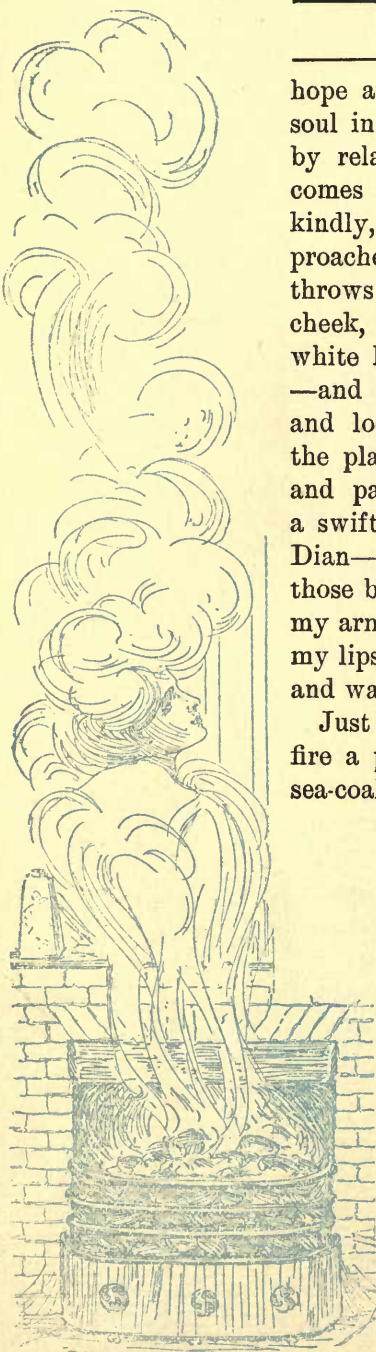
Coquetry whets the appetite; flirtation depraves it. Coquetry is the thorn that guards the rose—easily trimmed off when once plucked. Flirtation is like the slime on water-plants, making them hard to handle, and when caught, only to be cherished in slimy waters.

And so, with my eye clinging to the flickering blaze, I see in my reverie, a bright one dancing before me, with sparkling, coquettish smile, teasing me with the prettiest graces in the world—and I grow maddened between

By a City Grate

hope and fear, and still watch with my whole soul in my eyes; and see her features by and by relax to pity, as a gleam of sensibility comes stealing over her spirit—and then to a kindly, feeling regard: presently she approaches—a coy and doubtful approach—and throws back the ringlets that lie over her cheek, and lays her hand—a little bit of white hand—timidly upon my strong fingers—and turns her head daintily to one side—and looks up in my eyes, as they rest on the playing blaze; and my fingers close fast and passionately over that little hand, like a swift night-cloud shrouding the pale tips of Dian—and my eyes draw nearer and nearer to those blue, laughing, pitying, teasing eyes, and my arm clasps round that shadowy form—and my lips feel a warm breath—growing warmer and warmer —

Just here the maid comes in, throws upon the fire a panful of anthracite, and my sparkling sea-coal reverie is ended.



By a City Grate

ANTHRACITE

IT does not burn freely, so I put on the blower. Quaint and good-natured Xavier de Maistre¹ would have made, I dare say, a pretty epilogue about a sheet-iron blower; but I cannot.

I try to bring back the image that belonged to the lingering bituminous flame, but with my eyes on that dark blower—how can I?

It is the black curtain of destiny which drops down before our brightest dreams. How often the phantoms of joy regale us, and dance before us—golden-winged, angel-faced, heart-warming, and make an Elysium in which the dreaming soul bathes, and feels translated to another existence; and then—sudden as night, or a cloud—a word, a step, a thought, a memory will chase them away, like scared deer vanishing over a gray horizon of moor-land!

I know not justly, if it be a weakness or a

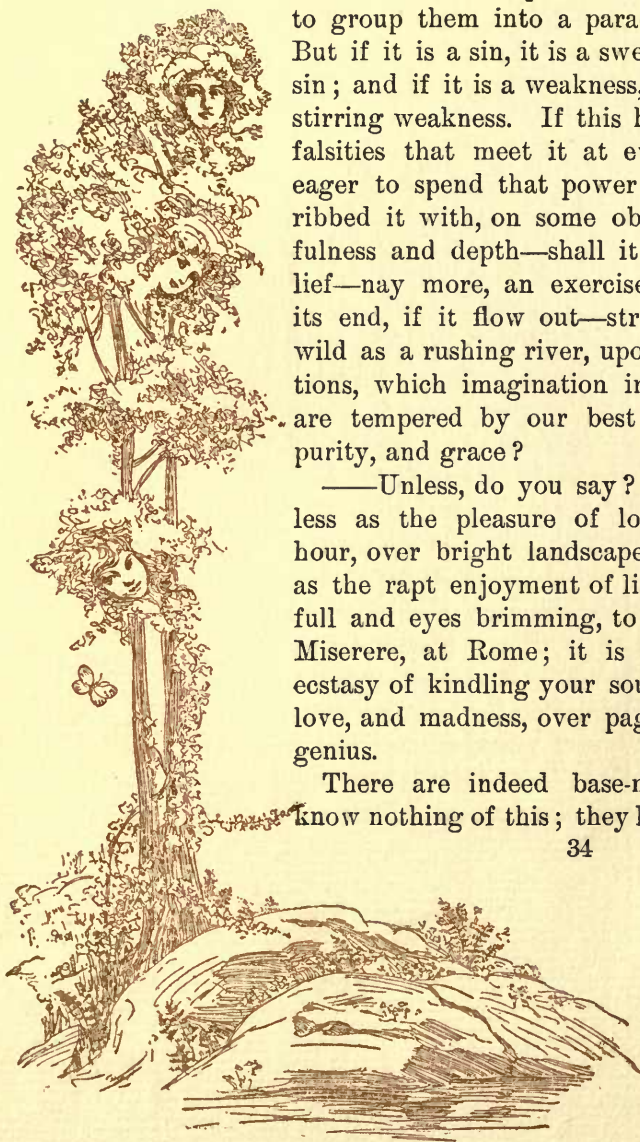
¹ Voyage autour de Ma Chambre.

By a City Grate

sin to create these phantoms that we love, and to group them into a paradise—soul-created. But if it is a sin, it is a sweet and enchanting sin; and if it is a weakness, it is a strong and stirring weakness. If this heart is sick of the falsities that meet it at every hand, and is eager to spend that power which nature has ribbed it with, on some object worthy of its fulness and depth—shall it not feel a rich relief—nay more, an exercise in keeping with its end, if it flow out—strong as a tempest, wild as a rushing river, upon those ideal creations, which imagination invents, and which are tempered by our best sense of beauty, purity, and grace?

—Unless, do you say? Ay, it is as useless as the pleasure of looking hour upon hour, over bright landscapes; it is as useless as the rapt enjoyment of listening with heart full and eyes brimming, to such music as the *Miserere*, at Rome; it is as useless as the ecstasy of kindling your soul into fervor and love, and madness, over pages that reek with genius.

There are indeed base-molded souls who know nothing of this; they laugh; they sneer;



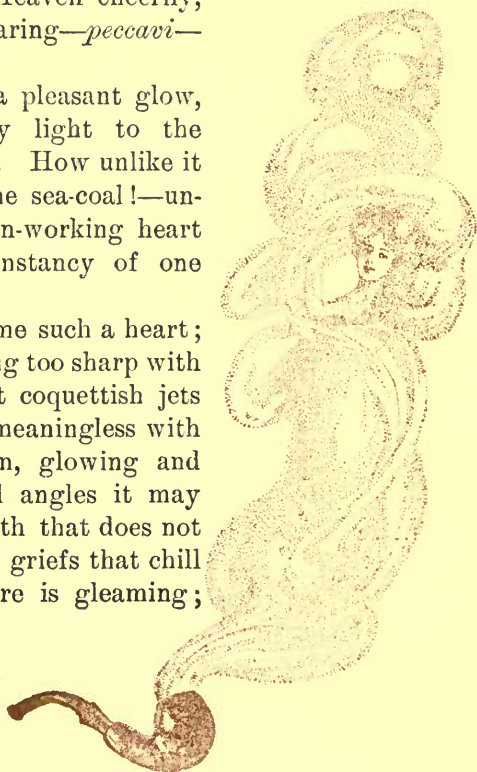
By a City Grate

they even affect to pity. Just so the Huns under the avenging Attila, who had been used to foul cookery and steaks stewed under their saddles, laughed brutally at the spiced banquets of an Apicius !

—No, this phantom-making is no sin ; or if it be, it is sinning with a soul so full, so earnest, that it can cry to Heaven cheerily, and sure of a gracious hearing—*peccavi—misericorde !*

But my fire is in a glow, a pleasant glow, throwing a tranquil, steady light to the farthest corner of my garret. How unlike it is, to the flashing play of the sea-coal !—unlike as an unsteady, uncertain-working heart to the true and earnest constancy of one cheerful and right.

After all, thought I, give me such a heart ; not bent on vanities, not blazing too sharp with sensibilities, not throwing out coquettish jets of flame, not wavering, and meaningless with pretended warmth, but open, glowing and strong. Its dark shades and angles it may have ; for what is a soul worth that does not take a slaty tinge from those griefs that chill the blood ? Yet still the fire is gleaming ;



By a City Grate

you see it in the crevices; and anon it will give radiance to the whole mass.

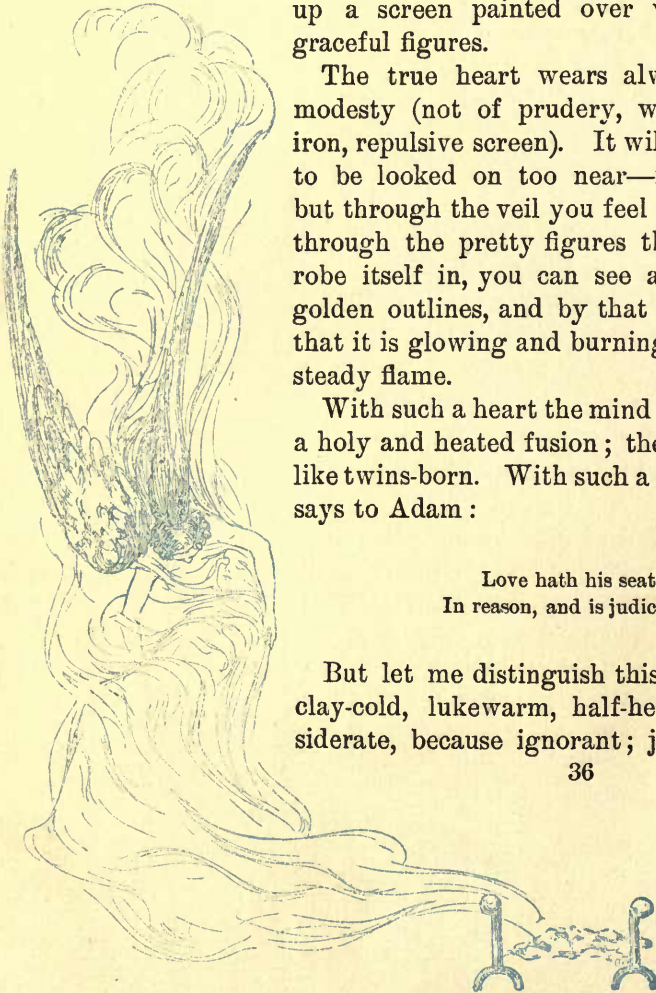
—It hurts the eyes, this fire; and I draw up a screen painted over with rough, but graceful figures.

The true heart wears always the veil of modesty (not of prudery, which is a dingy, iron, repulsive screen). It will not allow itself to be looked on too near—it might scorch; but through the veil you feel the warmth; and through the pretty figures that modesty will robe itself in, you can see all the while the golden outlines, and by that token, you *know* that it is glowing and burning with a pure and steady flame.

With such a heart the mind fuses naturally—a holy and heated fusion; they work together like twins-born. With such a heart, as Raphael says to Adam:

Love hath his seat
In reason, and is judicious.

But let me distinguish this heart from your clay-cold, lukewarm, half-hearted soul; considerate, because ignorant; judicious, because



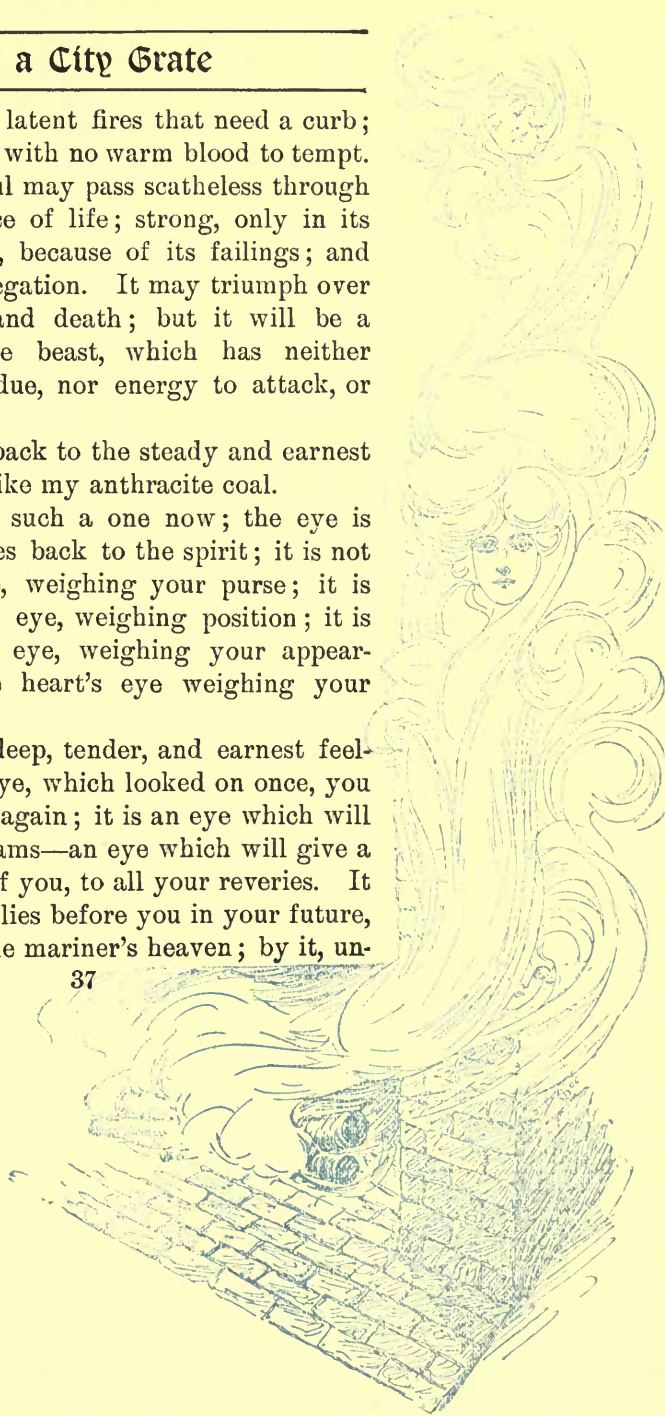
By a City Grate

possessed of no latent fires that need a curb; prudish, because with no warm blood to tempt. This sort of soul may pass scatheless through the fiery furnace of life; strong, only in its weakness; pure, because of its failings; and good, only by negation. It may triumph over love, and sin, and death; but it will be a triumph of the beast, which has neither passions to subdue, nor energy to attack, or hope to quench.

Let us come back to the steady and earnest heart, glowing like my anthracite coal.

I fancy I see such a one now; the eye is deep and reaches back to the spirit; it is not the trading eye, weighing your purse; it is not the worldly eye, weighing position; it is not the beastly eye, weighing your appearance; it is the heart's eye weighing your soul!

It is full of deep, tender, and earnest feeling. It is an eye, which looked on once, you long to look on again; it is an eye which will haunt your dreams—an eye which will give a color, in spite of you, to all your reveries. It is an eye which lies before you in your future, like a star in the mariner's heaven; by it, un-



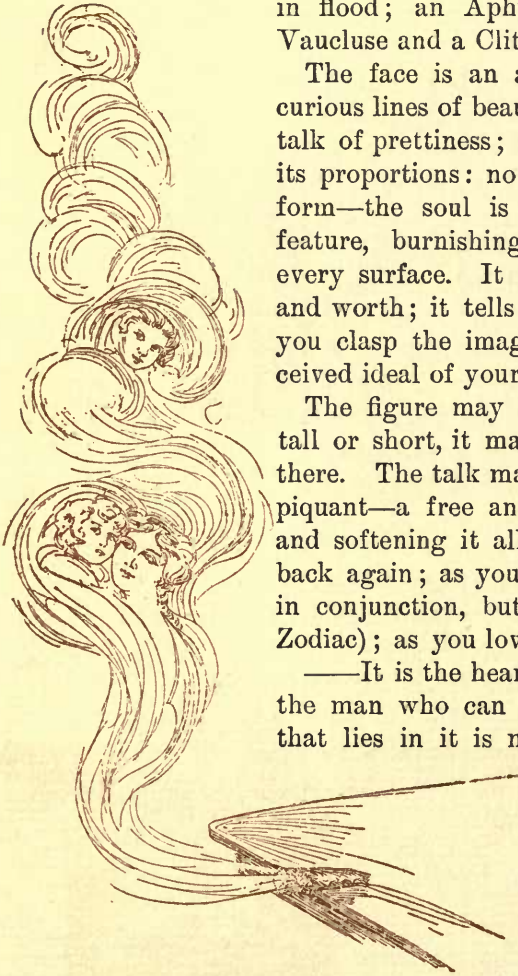
By a City Grate

consciously, and from force of deep soul habit, you take all your observations. It is meek and quiet; but it is full, as a spring that gushes in flood; an Aphrodite and a Mercury—a Vaucuse and a Clitumnus.

The face is an angel face; no matter for curious lines of beauty; no matter for popular talk of prettiness; no matter for its angles, or its proportions: no matter for its color or its form—the soul is there, illuminating every feature, burnishing every point, hallowing every surface. It tells of honesty, sincerity, and worth; it tells of truth and virtue—and you clasp the image to your heart, as the received ideal of your fondest dreams.

The figure may be this or that, it may be tall or short, it matters nothing—the heart is there. The talk may be soft or low, serious or piquant—a free and honest soul is warming and softening it all. As you speak, it speaks back again; as you think, it thinks again (not in conjunction, but in the same sign of the Zodiac); as you love, it loves in return.

—It is the heart for a sister, and happy is the man who can claim such! The warmth that lies in it is not only generous, but re-



By a City Grate

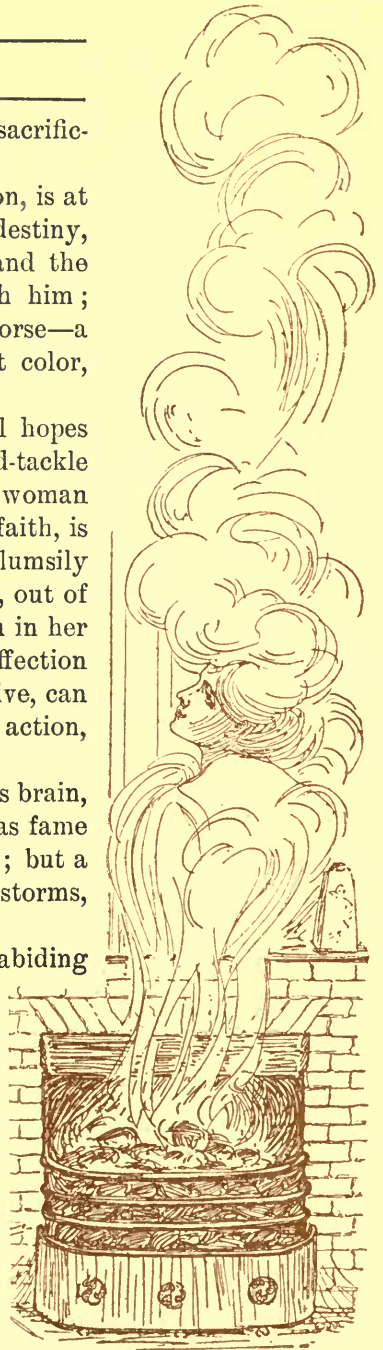
ligious, genial, devotional, tender, self-sacrificing, and looking heavenward.

A man without some sort of religion, is at best a poor reprobate, the football of destiny, with no tie linking him to infinity, and the wondrous eternity that is begun with him; but a woman without it, is even worse—a flame without heat, a rainbow without color, a flower without perfume!

A man may in some sort tie his frail hopes and honors, with weak, shifting ground-tackle to business, or to the world; but a woman without that anchor which they call faith, is adrift, and a wreck! A man may clumsily contrive a kind of moral responsibility, out of his relations to mankind; but a woman in her comparatively isolated sphere, where affection and not purpose is the controlling motive, can find no basis for any system of right action, but that of spiritual faith.

A man may craze his thought and his brain, to trustfulness in such poor harborage as fame and reputation may stretch before him; but a woman—where can she put her hope in storms, if not in Heaven?

And that sweet trustfulness—that abiding



By a City Grate

love—that enduring hope, mellowing every page and scene of life, lighting them with pleasantest radiance, when the world-storms break like an army with smoking cannon—what can bestow it all, but a holy soul-tie to what is above the storms, and to what is stronger than an army with cannon? Who that has enjoyed the counsel and the love of a Christian mother, but will echo the thought with energy, and hallow it with a tear?—*et moi, je pleurs!*

My fire is now a mass of red-hot coal. The whole atmosphere of my room is warm. The heat that with its glow can light up, and warm a garret with loose casements and shattered roof, is capable of the best love—domestic love. I draw farther off, and the images upon the screen change. The warmth, the hour, the quiet, create a home feeling; and that feeling, quick as lightning, has stolen from the world of fancy (a Promethean theft), a home object, about which my musings go on to drape themselves in luxurious reverie.

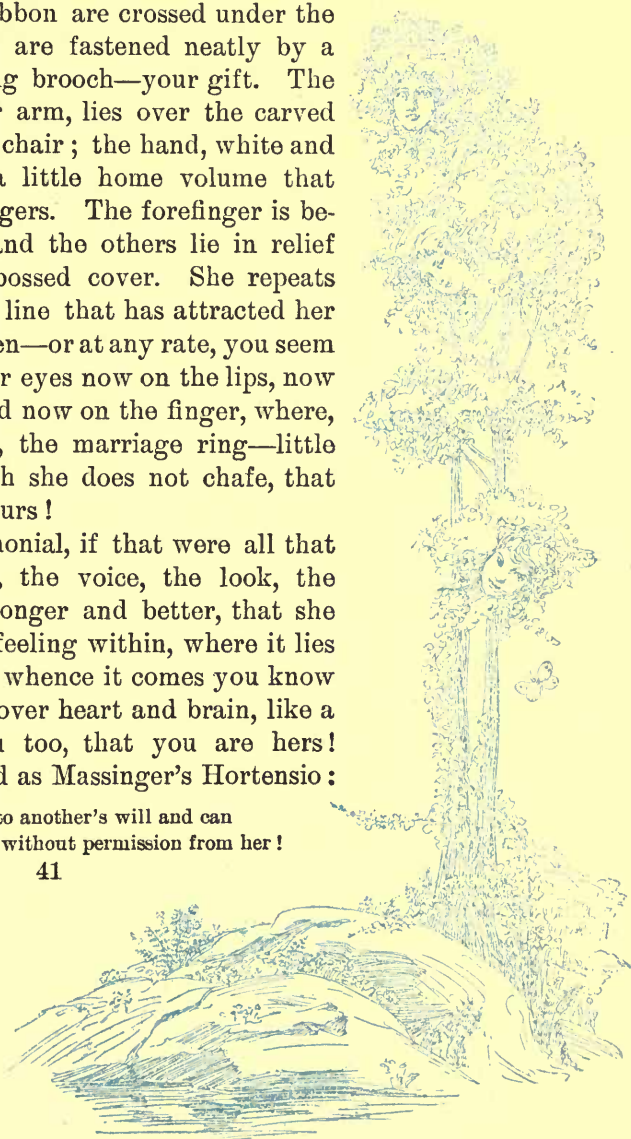
—There she sits, by the corner of the fire, in a neat home dress, of sober, yet most adorning color. A little bit of lace ruffle is gathered about the neck, by a blue ribbon; and

By a City Grate

the ends of the ribbon are crossed under the dimpling chin, and are fastened neatly by a simple, unpretending brooch—your gift. The arm, a pretty taper arm, lies over the carved elbow of the oaken chair; the hand, white and delicate, sustains a little home volume that hangs from her fingers. The forefinger is between the leaves, and the others lie in relief upon the dark embossed cover. She repeats in a silver voice a line that has attracted her fancy; and you listen—or at any rate, you seem to listen—with your eyes now on the lips, now on the forehead, and now on the finger, where, glitters like a star, the marriage ring—little gold band, at which she does not chafe, that tells you—she is yours!

—Weak testimonial, if that were all that told it! The eye, the voice, the look, the heart, tells you stronger and better, that she is yours. And a feeling within, where it lies you know not, and whence it comes you know not, but sweeping over heart and brain, like a fire-flood, tells you too, that you are hers! Irremediably bound as Massinger's Hortensio:

I am subject to another's will and can
Nor speak, nor do, without permission from her!

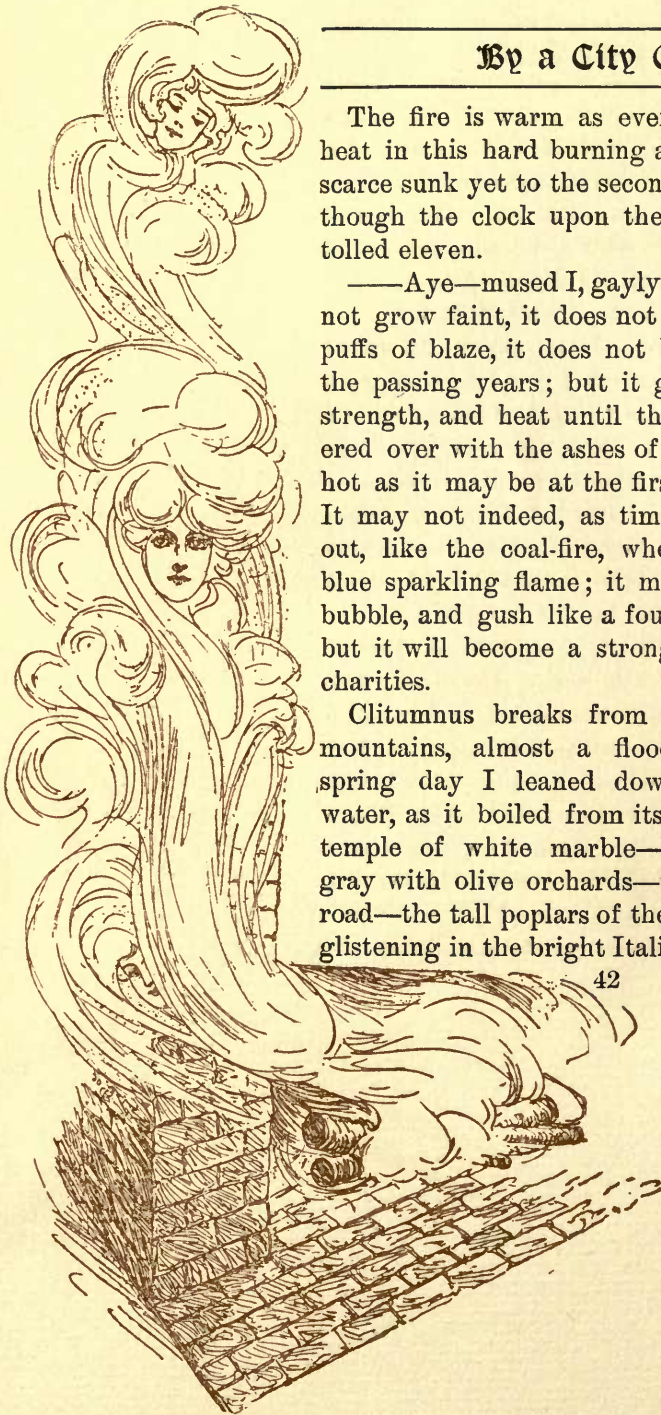


By a City Grate

The fire is warm as ever; what length of heat in this hard burning anthracite! It has scarce sunk yet to the second bar of the grate, though the clock upon the church-tower has tolled eleven.

—Aye—mused I, gayly—such a heart does not grow faint, it does not spend itself in idle puffs of blaze, it does not become chilly with the passing years; but it gains and grows in strength, and heat until the fire of life is covered over with the ashes of death. Strong or hot as it may be at the first, it loses nothing. It may not indeed, as time advances, throw out, like the coal-fire, when new-lit, jets of blue sparkling flame; it may not continue to bubble, and gush like a fountain at its source, but it will become a strong river of flowing charities.

Clitumnus breaks from under the Tuscan mountains, almost a flood; on a glorious spring day I leaned down and tasted the water, as it boiled from its sources; the little temple of white marble—the mountainsides gray with olive orchards—the white streak of road—the tall poplars of the river margin were glistening in the bright Italian sunlight around

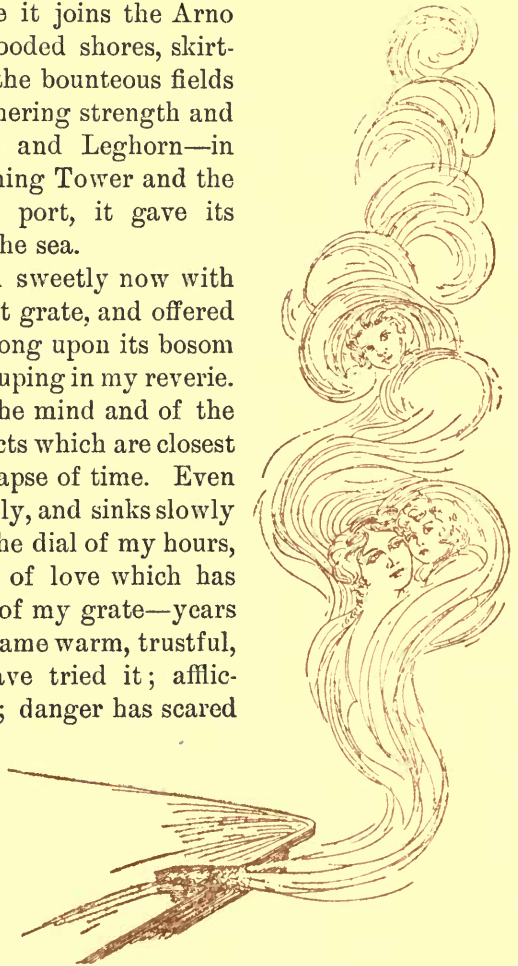


By a City Grate

me. Later, I saw it when it had become a river—still clear and strong, flowing serenely between its prairie banks, on which the white cattle of the valley browsed; and still farther down I welcomed it, where it joins the Arno—flowing slowly under wooded shores, skirting the fair Florence, and the bounteous fields of the bright Cascino; gathering strength and volume, till between Pisa and Leghorn—in sight of the wondrous Leaning Tower and the ship-masts of the Tuscan port, it gave its waters to its life's grave—the sea.

The recollection blended sweetly now with my musings, over my garret grate, and offered a flowing image, to bear along upon its bosom the affections that were grouping in my reverie.

It is a strange force of the mind and of the fancy, that can set the objects which are closest to the heart far down the lapse of time. Even now, as the fire fades slightly, and sinks slowly towards the bar, which is the dial of my hours, I seem to see that image of love which has played about the fire-glow of my grate—years hence. It still covers the same warm, trustful, religious heart. Trials have tried it; afflictions have weighed upon it; danger has scared



By a City Grate

it; and death is coming near to subdue it; but still it is the same.

The fingers are thinner; the face has lines of care, and sorrow, crossing each other in a web-work, that makes the golden tissue of humanity. But the heart is fond, and steady; it is the same dear heart, the same self-sacrificing heart, warming, like a fire, all around it. Affliction has tempered joy; and joy adorned affliction. Life and all its troubles have become distilled into an holy incense, rising ever from your fireside—an offering to your household gods.

Your dreams of reputation, your swift determination, your impulsive pride, your deep uttered vows to win a name, have all sobered into affection—have all blended into that glow of feeling, which finds its center, and hope, and joy in HOME. From my soul I pity him whose soul does not leap at the mere utterance of that name.

A home!—it is the bright, blessed, adorable phantom which sits highest on the sunny horizon that girdeth life! When shall it be reached? When shall it cease to be a glittering day-dream, and become fully and fairly yours?

By a City Grate

It is not the house, though that may have its charms ; nor the fields carefully tilled, and streaked with your own footpaths—nor the trees, though their shadow be to you like that of a great rock in a weary land—nor yet is it the fireside, with its sweet blaze-play—nor the pictures which tell of loved ones, nor the cherished books—but more far than all these—it is the PRESENCE. The Lares of your worship are there ; the altar of your confidence there ; the end of your worldly faith is there ; and adorning it all, and sending your blood in passionate flow, is the ecstasy of the conviction, that *there* at least you are beloved ; that there you are understood ; that there your errors will meet ever with gentlest forgiveness : that there your troubles will be smiled away ; that there you may unburden your soul, fearless of harsh, unsympathizing ears ; and that there you may be entirely and joyfully—yourself !

There may be those of coarse mold—and I have seen such even in the disguise of women—who will reckon these feelings puling sentiment. God pity them !—as they have need of pity.



By a City Grate

—That image by the fireside, calm, loving, joyful, is there still: it goes not, however my spirit tosses, because my wish, and every will, keep it there, unerring.

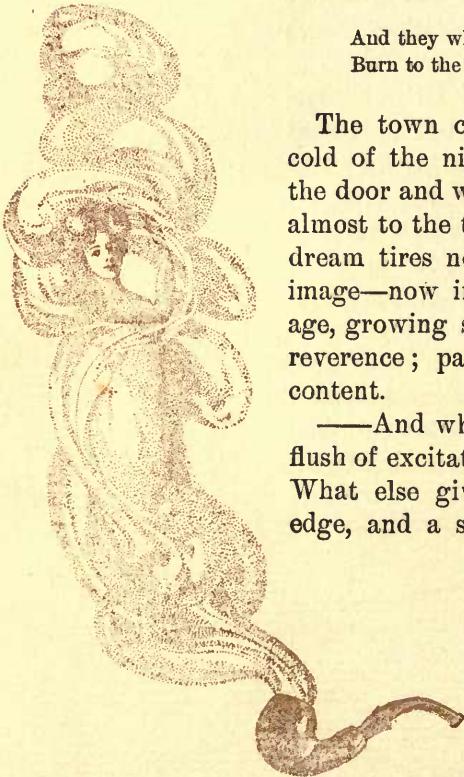
The fire shows through the screen, yellow and warm, as a harvest sun. It is in its best age, and that age is ripeness.

A ripe heart!—now I know what Wordsworth meant, when he said:

The good die first,
And they whose hearts are dry as summer dust,
Burn to the socket!

The town clock is striking midnight. The cold of the night-wind is urging its way in at the door and window-crevice; the fire has sunk almost to the third bar of the grate. Still my dream tires not, but wraps fondly round that image—now in the far off, chilling mists of age, growing sainted. Love has blended into reverence; passion has subsided into joyous content.

—And what if age comes, said I, in a new flush of excitement—what else proves the wine? What else gives inner strength, and knowledge, and a steady pilot-hand, to steer your



By a City Grate

boat out bodily upon that shoreless sea, where the river of life is running? Let the white ashes gather; let the silver hair lie, where lay the auburn; let the eye gleam farther back, and dimmer; it is but retreating towards the pure sky-depths, an usher to the land where you will follow after.

It is quite cold, and I take away the screen altogether; there is a little glow yet, but presently the coal slips down below the third bar, with a rumbling sound—like that of coarse gravel falling into a new-dug grave.

—She is gone!

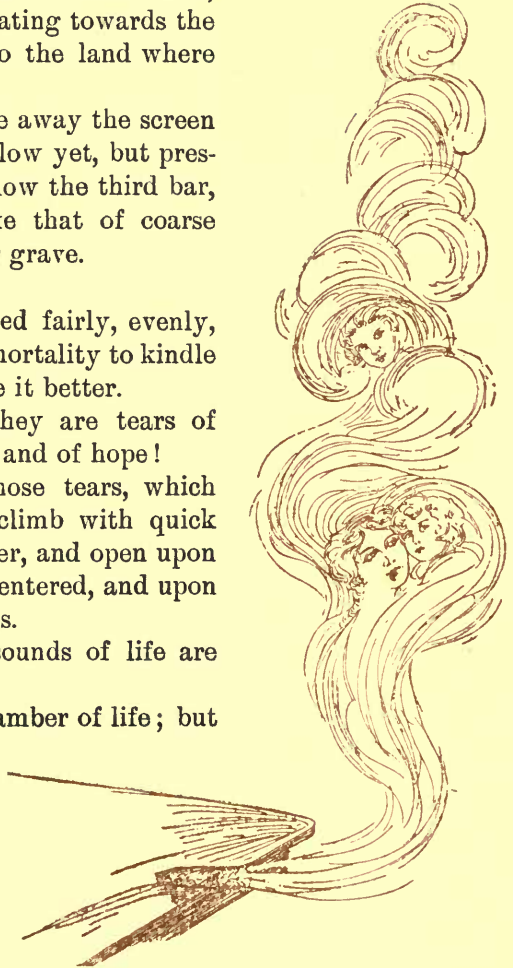
Well, the heart has burned fairly, evenly, generously, while there was mortality to kindle it; eternity will surely kindle it better.

—Tears indeed; but they are tears of thanksgiving, of resignation, and of hope!

And the eyes, full of those tears, which ministering angels bestow, climb with quick vision, upon the angelic ladder, and open upon the futurity where she has entered, and upon the country, which she enjoys.

It is midnight, and the sounds of life are dead.

You are in the death chamber of life; but



By a City Grate

you are also in the death chamber of care. The world seems sliding backward ; and hope and you are sliding forward. The clouds, the agonies, the vain expectancies, the braggart noise, and fears, now vanish behind the curtain of the past, and of the night. They roll from your soul like a load.

In the dimness of what seems the ending present, you reach out your prayerful hands towards that boundless future, where God's eye lifts over the horizon, like sunrise on the ocean. Do you recognize it as an earnest of something better ? Aye, if the heart has been pure, and steady—burning like my fire—it has learned it without seeming to learn. Faith has grown upon it, as the blossom grows upon the bud, or the flower upon the slow-lifting stalk.

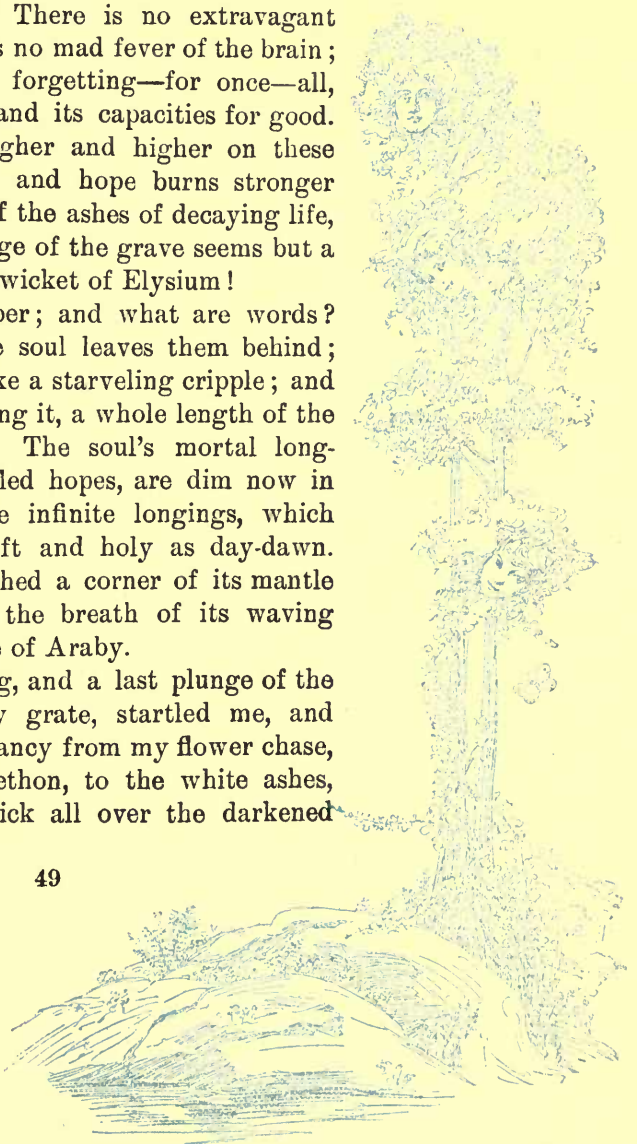
Cares cannot come into the dream-land where I live. They sink with the dying street noise, and vanish with the embers of my fire. Even ambition, with its hot and shifting flame, is all gone out. The heart in the dimness of the fading fire-glow is all itself. The memory of what good things have come over it in the troubled youth-life, bear it up ; and hope and

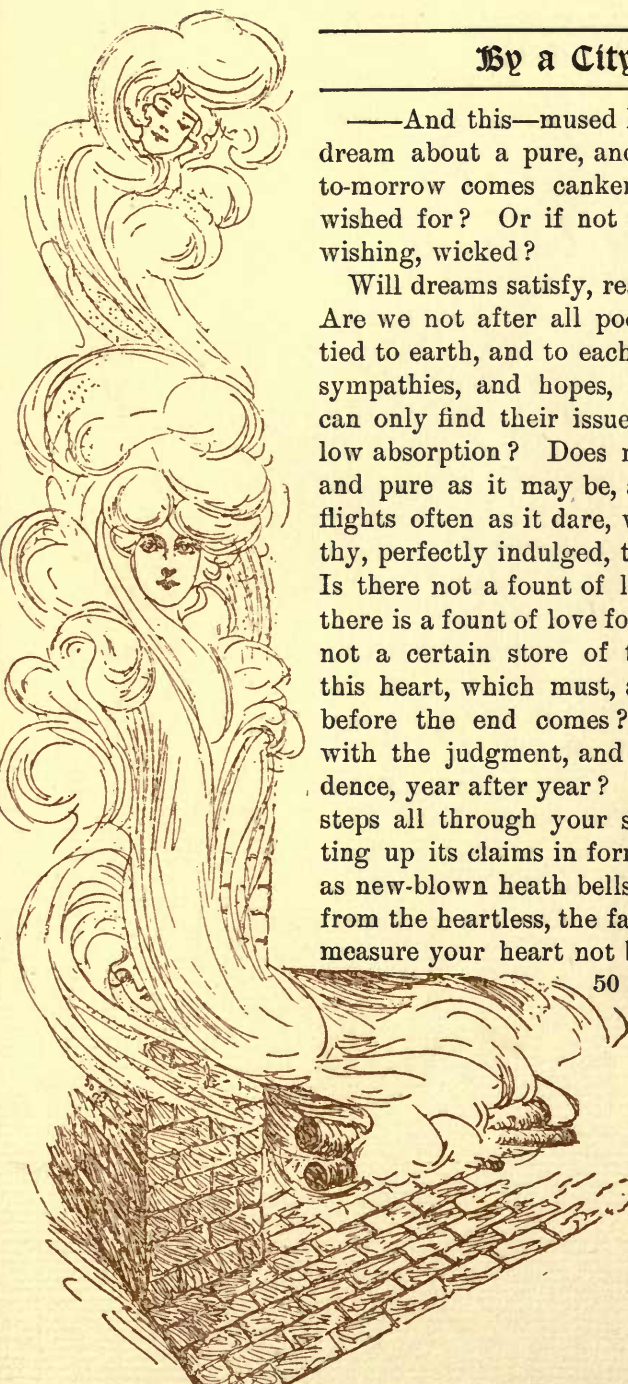
By a City Grate

faith bear it on. There is no extravagant pulse-glow; there is no mad fever of the brain; but only the soul, forgetting—for once—all, save its destinies and its capacities for good. And it mounts higher and higher on these wings of thought; and hope burns stronger and stronger out of the ashes of decaying life, until the sharp edge of the grave seems but a foot-scraper at the wicket of Elysium!

But what is paper; and what are words? Vain things! The soul leaves them behind; the pen staggers like a starveling cripple; and your heart is leaving it, a whole length of the life-course behind. The soul's mortal longings—its poor baffled hopes, are dim now in the light of those infinite longings, which spread over it, soft and holy as day-dawn. Eternity has stretched a corner of its mantle towards you, and the breath of its waving fringe is like a gale of Araby.

A little rumbling, and a last plunge of the cinders within my grate, startled me, and dragged back my fancy from my flower chase, beyond the Phlegethon, to the white ashes, that were now thick all over the darkened coals.





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—And this—mused I—is only a bachelor-dream about a pure, and loving heart! And to-morrow comes cankerous life again—is it wished for? Or if not wished for, is the not wishing, wicked?

Will dreams satisfy, reach high as they can? Are we not after all poor groveling mortals, tied to earth, and to each other; are there not sympathies, and hopes, and affections which can only find their issue, and blessing, in fellow absorption? Does not the heart, steady, and pure as it may be, and mounting on soul flights often as it dare, want a human sympathy, perfectly indulged, to make it healthful? Is there not a fount of love for this world, as there is a fount of love for the other? Is there not a certain store of tenderness, cooped in this heart, which must, and *will* be lavished, before the end comes? Does it not plead with the judgment, and make issue with prudence, year after year? Does it not dog your steps all through your social pilgrimage, setting up its claims in forms fresh, and odorous as new-blown heath bells, saying—come away from the heartless, the factitious, the vain, and measure your heart not by its constraints, but

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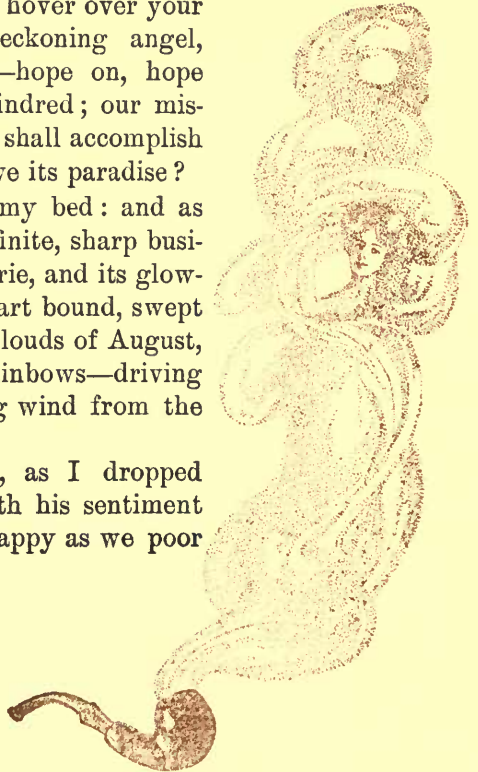
by its fullness, and by its depth! let it run, and be joyous!

Is there no demon that comes to your harsh night-dreams, like a taunting fiend, whispering—be satisfied; keep your heart from running over; bridle those affections; there is nothing worth loving?

Does not some sweet being hover over your spirit of reverie like a beckoning angel, crowned with halo, saying—hope on, hope ever; the heart and I are kindred; our mission will be fulfilled; nature shall accomplish its purpose; the soul shall have its paradise?

—I threw myself upon my bed: and as my thoughts ran over the definite, sharp business of the morrow, my reverie, and its glowing images, that made my heart bound, swept away, like those fleecy rain clouds of August, on which the sun paints rainbows—driving southward, by the cool, rising wind from the north.

—I wonder—thought I, as I dropped asleep—if a married man with his sentiment made actual, is after all, as happy as we poor fellows, in our dreams?



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